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GAY MELODY

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MARTHA GWINN KISER



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LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
NEW YORK · LONDON · TORONTO

1949

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., INC.
55 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 3

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO. LTD.
6 & 7 CLIFFORD STREET, LONDON W 1

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
215 VICTORIA STREET, TORONTO 1

GAY MELODY

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA
BY LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., TORONTO

FIRST EDITION

Printed in the United States of America
Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., Binghamton, N. Y.

FOR ALL GIRLS

WITH A LAUGH AND A DREAM

OTHER BOOKS BY
MARTHA GWINN KISER

ROSANNA
SYLVIA SINGS OF APPLES



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GAY MELODY



CHAPTER ONE

MELODY WOULD STAY OFF THE SHELF

THE HOT afternoon sun was scorching the red right out of the muslin roses that bobbed so furiously upon Miss Rhoda Melody Merrill's white chip bonnet. The dust of the Big Road out of Concord was fair covering her thin little summer slippers as they sped her toward home at a good gait. Thin rivulets of perspiration ran down her face in spite of the fancy green parasol that she held above her and she was unable to wipe them away even with the four flounced petticoats and the topskirt of flowered india mull. With her reticule to tend with one hand and her parasol to anchor with the other, and a handkerchief lost since the early hours of this fractious day, a body had all she could do. It was too early to carry a parasol, Mother and the girls had argued when she had set out with it that morning, scarce spring. But a ruffled parasol did lend a lady such an air. And the weather had obligingly turned out hot.

But it was only perspiration on her cheeks, Melody told herself fiercely. It certainly was not tears. No, she would never shed a tear, school or no school. If selectmen like Brother Millspaugh had to get mad because they got caught on their own questions when the Board "waited on" her, and found she could answer

when they could not, then let them wait for the young man from Boston and give him the school, as it had been rumored round-about they were anxious to do. Let them, what cared she? And what did she care if folks should laugh at her for trying and failing? Still Melody's discontent was more than that; and it was more than pique. It was discouragement. Though women were not often teachers she had always longed to be one. Even in her own classes, though she could answer almost every question, she had wanted, instead, to ask them herself.

"Now you're such a fine young lady and want to teach school 'stead of doing woman's work," Brother Millspaugh had said around the quid that he worried that afternoon in the examination, and he had squinted his eyes as if he knew that he had her in a tight place and she could not answer, "tell me this — how long has school maintenance been a haff-to in this state of Massachusetts?"

"Fourteen — no, fifteen years. Since eighteen 'thirty!" Melody had shot back at him proudly. And she had looked him and Silas Hobberstock and Emil Snodgrass, all three, steadily and unflinchingly in the eye.

"Well, then, when did the first, what they call high school, start up and where at?" asked Millspaugh, and he swung his foot and cast round his eyes at his fellow selectmen. They would be surprised to see the catchy questions he could ask. But he was surprised to see the catchy questions this Merrill girl could answer.

"The first high school in this United States was started in Boston, right here at home you might say, in the year — 18 — 1821."

"Now you shore?" inquired Millspaugh. "Seems to me it was later."

"She's right," said Emil Snodgrass. "I mind Pa told me and he's a school teacher himself."

"Well, all right," the paunchy Millspaugh had said, not being able to let well-enough alone, "But tell me this — how big does a town have to be, this state, 'fore it can have a tax-supported high school?" He worried with a bit of loose leather on the heel of his high boot and again cast his eyes at his colleagues in triumph. A body had to hit on a question sometime that a fool female could not answer. He wished he had not started this questioning, though, just between her and himself and the gatepost.

"Five hundred families in any town gives it the right to a tax-supported high school. And they can be little or big families. The statute was passed in 1827," Melody shot back at him.

Then the three selectmen stood up, for they had all been sitting down while Melody stood, and they had pushed back their chairs and had jerked down their waistcoats, pulled hats upon their slightly befuddled heads and left the office of the village hall saying they would think things over and let her know.

Half way up Dugan's Hill Melody closed the befrilled parasol and tucked it beneath her arm. She upped her skirts and wiped her small and discouraged face. She had never learned that at Mrs. Farragut's Charm School, she thought to herself grimly. But she dropped the skirts quick as a shot. For there, coming round the bend and whipping up the dust of the Big Road at a great rate came Brother Millspaugh's carryall. He was on his way back to Brier's Nest.

"Well! It looks like I'm just in time to give a little lady a lift! Climb right in beside me and spare your shoe soles. No use walking on a hot day like this when you can ride. Shore did turn hot all of a sudden." He cramped the vehicle so that she might step up.

"Oh, I — I thank you, Mr. Millspaugh — "

"Brother Millspaugh, Miss Melody. Don't ever forget that I'm more interested in the Lord's work than I am in any school."

"Yes — Brother Millspaugh. Well — well, thank you for the offer to ride but I — I think I'll just walk along. It's not far and I — That is — "

"Come on! Come on, Miss Melody! You ain't going to be bashful with me are you? To tell you the truth I was hoping I would overtake you on the way home. I want to have a little talk with you."

Perhaps he was going to tell her they had decided she was to have the school — in spite of her knowing enough to teach it, she thought grimly. With some hesitation she climbed into the carryall.

Millspaugh switched the quid from one cheek to the other and played the lines upon the backs of his farm horses. The horses, Melody knew, did very little farming. No, they carried their master roundabout to church meetings and schoolboard meetings and what not. Their owner was too busy and too ambitious to farm.

"You know, Miss Melody," he began kindly, "I just plumb hate to see a nice, genteel, womanly girl like you going in for this self-supporting stuff. No, these here modern females! I just plumb hate to see you taking up such ways. Now, why don't you marry a good man and do the noblest work to woman's hand — fambly raising?

"Now me! I've been looking round quite a spell for some good woman to take that place in my own fambly, my good wife passing on, as you know, more than a year ago. Year and two weeks, to be exact. Gramma is too old to wait on herself, much less to tend a passel of young 'uns. Yes, I've got me five as fine

children as ever you seen. And a house, maybe not fine but as good as most if I do say so. And plenty to eat.

"Now I wouldn't want me no old woman, set in her ways. I made up my mind to that when I seen you standing up there this afternoon and I says to myself —"

"Oh, Mr. Millspaugh! Please! I — I guess I'll get out here." Millspaugh had to pull up abruptly or Melody would have tumbled out over the wheels.

"All right, Missy! You keep on with your gay and uppity ways and you'll never get a husband, mark my words. There's many as would be glad to have me asking for their company, a selectman and a preacher and all!" He cut at his team fiercely with his whip and then he stopped again suddenly.

"Listen here, Miss Melody!" His voice changed to persuasiveness. "Now wait now, just a minute. I guess I was plumb precipitate — if that's the way you call it — asking your hand like that just on the spur of the minute. And I'm sorry for them names I mentioned, gay and uppity. I didn't mean nothing by that. You're young, but you're certainly not uppity and as far as gay goes — I'm ashamed to the bone that I ever let the word cross my lips. It ain't a nice word to pass about a young lady and I could have bit out my tongue the minute I said it. No, I need me a good level-headed woman like you, you keeping the fambly on the farm and me out on the Lord's work. Reckon you've heard, Miss Melody, that I've got me high ideas. Now if you was to marry me you wouldn't be only a common farmer's wife. I plan to go circuit riding some way or how, it's His will. I've always hankered to. And like I say, us two working together we could do a heap of good in this sin-sodden world."

But Melody turned away in anger and set swiftly out along the Big Road.

"Miss Melody!" cried Millspaugh after her. "I'm the boss and if I make up my mind you're to have Brier's Nest school it's yourn. Ain't nobody else got the say-so like I have. If you wasn't so uppity and could see things right I would see nobody else but you got it. But you acting up like this—I dunno! Guess we better wait for that Boston feller like we planned."

On Melody flounced, not turning a single backward look. Her heart was well-nigh bursting with indignation. And Millspaugh was off down the road in a spurt of dust, with never even a nod to the young man who now approached.

This young man was slim and dark-eyed. A dreamer, some would have thought upon first seeing him. But Melody knew him well and only thought that if she must be caught dabbing at her cheek with a lace mitt and maybe looking ready to cry it did not much matter; it was only Hen.

"Howdy, Melody. Been in to Concord? So have I. I've been getting some beans to plant. Season is going to be past before I get them in, if I don't hurry," said Henry Thoreau. "It's nice out there at Walden. You ought to stop by sometime."

"I will, Henry," said Melody. "Yes, I've been in to Concord. I've been trying for that teaching position at Brier's Nest."

"Why good for you, Melody! I heard they were looking for a teacher for next fall," said Henry. "Tobe Scarrett taught there last winter and old Monty Cullison, I think, the year before. I hear that up there they don't spare the rod and spoil the child. Poor too, those families. Yes, the children at Brier's Nest could do with a gentle woman teacher and I hope you get the school. I guess, though, they have to take what Selectman Millspaugh gives them."

"Yes!" said Melody. "And seems as if it weren't a matter for folks like him to decide. I declare it makes one wonder just how

many children are having the right kind of learning. I mean, if all over America ignorant, no-account, chicken-gobbling Mills-paughs are in the saddle!" She paused for breath. Maybe Hen would just think she was angry because she, herself, had not been given the position. She faced him squarely and declared, "The men who pick out teachers should know what they are doing. They should care about children!"

When Henry Thoreau turned into a side road Melody caught up her voluminous skirts and hurried on. Past Nath's little white church, past Sheridan's Wood, and finally around the last bend in the road toward home. Yes, there was her family in the yard. All out looking for her. Eager to hear her news.

Nath mowed the grass with a scythe. He was never idle in his own home or in his father's. How Melody loved her one big brother. And there was his wife, Rosanna, with the twins and baby Jasper. Melody's mother sat in the veranda "looking" greens. The two girls, Emmeline and Caroline, had come over with their babies, and another sister, Bethinda, stood at the gate shading her eyes with her hand. She was looking not so much for her, Melody knew, as for her brand-new husband, Bart Andrews.

Yes, they were all there waiting for her, their unmarried, baby sister who was sometimes called "gay." She who had bravely gone to Concord to get herself a position teaching school, no matter what harsh or slighting things were said of women teachers. And there was Patience Sheridan too. Patience always declared that she "fair adored" Melody's independence though she had not an ounce of independence herself.

Melody tried to muster a don't-care smile but her lips trembled and she bit them. With eyes cast down she approached them slowly.

"Oh, Mel — "

"Oh, you didn't get — "

"Well now, honey, I wouldn't care one single bit if I was you!"

And so they comforted her, one after the other. But her mother declared, "Well, now I don't know but what I'm just right glad you didn't get it! Though I did consent, still I was kind of against it. So much has been said about female teachers. Academies of course, they're a different thing. Women teachers in them has come to be a common thing. But in public schools—well, I was kind of dubious."

"Tell us what happened, honey," Nath said.

"Well," said Melody, as she flung herself down upon the top step of the veranda and took off her bonnet, "you see I was the only one who took the examination for the school. Anyway, nobody else was there today. And that old Millspaugh, I think he expected two or three men to try for it. Clate Burnam over beyond Concord. And Newt Holliday. And somebody from Boston, if you please! A Mr. Walton or some such name. It seems he wrote them that he would come, and being from the city, why, you know Millspaugh and Emil Snodgrass—all he would have had to do to get it was to show up. But he didn't come and neither did the others. Or even send any word. Still, they kept waiting for this Mr. Walton.

"Well, they waited round till afternoon before they even listened to me read or spell or cipher. I just sat there in that little shady, kind of damp office, on that old hard chair, doing sums in whispers and praying the good Lord I wouldn't forget. And praying a little that nobody else would come! They just all stalked round and looked at the clock and took out their watches and finally they went home for their dinners, and still I sat there doing sums and spelling to myself. And aspiring! And perspir-

ing!" Melody was clowning now. "Well, they came back after dinner and that old Millspaugh — Brother, he insists on being called — he said he reckoned they might as well hear me. And I just did fine! Honestly I did! I guess I was more surprised to hear myself giving the right answers than they were, I was that frightened."

"Did they brag on you, Mel, honey?" That was Rosanna, Nath's wife.

"Oh, my no, Rosann! They wouldn't do that! No — they just kind of chewed. They looked at me keenlike while I stood there before them, and they made me spell every word over two or three times. Yes, they just sat there, all three of them, their three chins and their six legs sticking out before them. They would all look at me kind of suspicious when I would say what towns were in what states. And how many pints three and two-thirds gallons make. They would look at each other and then let it go.

"And after they had asked all the questions they could think of they looked at my handwriting. Millspaugh didn't think I made my curlicues long enough. He said an educated man — or even a woman — could always be told by the length and flourish of his curlicues. He did not like mine. And of course when he didn't like them, neither could the others.

"Well, then he said they could not make up their minds right away. There was a mighty fine, educated fellow from Boston-way that they had expected. He had written and asked to be examined. They all said they wished this Boston fellow had come. It would be nice for Brier's Nest to have a teacher from Boston.

"Then old Mr. Millspaugh said that if I did get the school they would all be watching me like a hawk watches a chicken. And that if the Pa's and Ma's were not satisfied with what their

children were learning, why of course, I would be taken off and replaced by a man so quick it would make my head swim. Any man, he said, Boston or not. The last thing they said was, they would think it over."

Melody carefully refrained from telling of the offer of marriage Millspaugh had so gallantly made. That would be for the ears of Mother and the girls alone, when one could shout with merriment. Tell it before that teasing Nath and she would be known as Sister Millspaugh the rest of her life.

"Well, it's all right, as I say, if your mind is plumb set on it, Melody," conceded her mother as they all moved into the farmhouse in preparation for supper. "But I never could understand why you want to do such a flyaway thing as teach school. You have a good home and don't need for anything. Some think it is kind of forward, women teaching school. In private homes and academies, that's genteel, but these public schools—I don't know."

"Some think it is worse than forward, Mother, some think it is positively gay." Melody laughed. "Well I'm going into the summer kitchen and bathe and get into fresh clothes. I'm just a loblolly of dust and perspiration and — being looked at by that tobacco-chewing body of selectmen! I'm glad they won't be in the seats of Brier's Nest school, staring back at me, if I am lucky enough to get the school."

As Melody stood in the old wooden washtub in the summer kitchen she rubbed her small, slim form with the homespun towel and went into a daze of thinking. Her mother had said she did not know why she wanted to do such a flyaway thing as to go away from home and teach school. But Melody, herself, knew why.

She liked to be with children, for one thing. But she wanted to

teach for another reason, an unspoken one, even to herself. When a girl was of a family as large as the Merrills', and when all of them were married but one's self, who had never even kept steady company with a young man, and when one was way past seventeen years old — well, it was time to do something about it.

It was time to do something about staying "off the shelf" as Mistress Schoolmaster Snodgrass had sniffed about Rebecca Masters. "She's on the shelf. Never will marry. Always have to live with her kin," Mistress Schoolmaster had said, and not kindly.

No, much as Melody loved her sisters and her brother Nath and his wife, Rosanna, and their adorables, still she would never be simply the old-maid aunt of the family, on that she was determined. She would never be like old Rebecca, going one place for a day or two and somewhere else for a week. She would be loved well, it was true, but she would also be pitied. Here Melody could almost have sniffed a tear at her own possible predicament. Yes, her life might be a hard one, she mused, the life of an old maid, but she would never be an old maid on the shelf.

Now she lathered and hummed. But it was only humming, not caroling to the rafters as was her custom when in the good warm suds. For not getting the school at Brier's Nest changed other plans. She and Patience had been talking about going to Philadelphia, for a long time. Had she gotten the school suitable clothes for teaching would have been reason enough for the trip. And of course, the worldly wisdom that a schoolmarm ought to have. Now the trip seemed a little pointless. Still, anything would be better than moping here at home. And anyway they had not said she could not have the school. They had said they would think it over. She might get it yet. And that Patience would be disappointed if she gave up the Philadelphia idea.

"All right, Patience, in a moment!" she called in reply to a banging upon the door.

Yes, she would go to Philadelphia just the same. She would go places and have fun. And she would most certainly stay off the shelf!

"Your mother says to hurry up, Mel. Supper is ready and Nath and Rosanna have to go home to feed the stock and milk," called Patience Sheridan, who was as much at home here as in her own home. She broke off to exclaim, "Well, my good land of living, who is that going by?"

"Well, upon my word and honor! If it isn't our old neighbors!" That was Nath.

"Oh, Mother! Look who is passing!"

"That poor woman! My heart goes out to her!" Melody heard her mother say.

"Well, I do declare if they aren't back!" from Rosanna.

"Who, Mother? Who, Nath? Who is it? Tell me, somebody! Who on earth is it anyway?" Quickly Melody snatched up her wet towels, and trailing wet footmarks across the floor, she dashed into the front room after the family as it gathered on the veranda or stood in the doorway.

"Who is it, Emmeline? What are you all looking at? Let me see!" Melody ducked under Nath's arm and looked out over the Big Road that wound past the farmhouse.

Upon a wagon drawn by a weary-looking team rode the household furniture of a family. Tables and chairs cocked up their legs wantonly, their flounced calico skirts hanging shamelessly down, displaying all. Feather pillows made a high and easy seat for a little blonde girl. An older and fatter one sat upon a high-boy, holding a teapot in her lap. Still another girl crouched in the back of the wagon, holding a coal-oil lamp. And immediately

behind the father and mother, who sat upon the wagon seat, there stood a grave, tall, auburn-haired girl balancing a mirror.

"Mind that mirror while you're staring round, Louisa," called the mother. She looked tired and not too happy. But the father lifted his whip in cheery salutation and beamed round upon all the country and its inhabitants with a pleased eye; a happy look of home-coming.

Melody's eyes looked into the eyes of the tall girl with the mirror. And the girl's eyes looked directly, almost defiantly, back. It was as if she said, "Well! Here we are again! Have a good look at us!" But her defiance gave way to a wide smile as Melody waved her towel, and she waved back. And so everybody in the farmhouse porch smiled and waved.

"Well! I'll declare to goodness if it isn't that Bronson Alcott and his family back from Fruitlands!" said Mrs. Merrill.

CHAPTER TWO

A TRIP TO PHILADELPHIA

THIS THING of going round to never-and-gone by boat and stage and all such vehicles to trade at Philadelphia when a body could get the very best styles in Boston, just a whoop and a holler across country, was a mighty uppity thing to do if you asked her, declared Mistress Schoolmaster Snodgrass, and other folks said so as well, when the news got roundabout that Melody Merrill and Patience Sheridan were going to make the trip. But of course both of them already had the reputation of being feisty and gay at all the play-parties and such.

And right there, going to the city to trade, was rope enough for a woman teacher to hang herself on, Mistress Schoolmaster further declared. She had heard tell that Melody tried to get Brier's Nest school. Was gallivanting to hither and yon the thing for a sober, genteel woman teacher — if ever they were sober and genteel? She reckoned that poor honest men in their butternut breeches would not have much place in the world of education, once this fiddle-saddle of woman teachers got aholt. Reckoned their poor families would sit and starve — this with a fat goose under one of her arms and five pounds of good yellow cheese under the other. Yes, she reckoned, they could go back to peg-

ging shoes. And with all the newfangled selling and manufacturing going on, even pegging shoes was not the paying occupation it once had been. Not even with the village school-teaching did it amount to much.

But little cared the Misses Melody Merrill and Patience Sheridan what commercial disaster their trip to Philadelphia furthered. They acted as if taking the stagecoach out of Concord was nothing at all. Two days' travel? Why, that was only the beginning and fun — they had never had more fun in their lives, they declared, to each other.

Melody was happy, barring of course her disappointment at not having the Brier's Nest school. But with the excitement of travel, seeing new faces and meeting new and interesting people — from all over the world she supposed — one could almost forget completely, at least for the time being, any and all disappointments that had ever been.

True, after going to bed, when things were quiet, the little hard thought always came that maybe she was not going to be a schoolteacher. But the pain in her breast was soothed quickly by sleep after these full, full days; of that she was glad.

After the first part of the trip by stagecoach there followed a night on a canal boat where they slept in hammocks, with nobody grumbling. Travel was travel, and anyway to get there. A body didn't mind how she slept, being asleep, Patience reasonably pointed out; having room to get dressed smartly in the morning was the important thing. For in the morning when they tried to dress they found the boat-quarters crowded indeed. And it was hard for one to flare up one's curls and smooth ruffles and use a bit of face powder stealthily when the older women were not looking. It was a try-patience task getting one's self even

halfway presentable for the remainder of the journey, elbowing about with half a dozen other ladies.

But at last that was accomplished, and when the passengers had all gathered on deck, it was many an admiring glance they received. Of course the dampness had taken the curl out of Melody's forehead curl-cluster, but it had been looking stringy for a long time and she had been waiting to go to Boston for a new one. Now to buy it in Philadelphia was better, of course. Not because the curls were any curlier or any glossier, she explained to Patience. But when anyone said, "Your lovely curl-cluster! Why they just look nearly real!" it would be a proud moment to say, "Oh, do you really like them? Well, of course, I bought them in Philadelphia."

Patience knew exactly what she meant.

So Melody set her white chip bonnet with the roses atilt at a more precarious angle over her brow and hid the old curl-cluster. Gay, Patience said she looked, and Melody put up her nose, pleased at the accusation. Gay or not she would purchase a new bonnet. What were curl-clusters without accompanying accessories?

The frills of the blue persian tasseta had not wrinkled too badly even with all the dampness, and with the long, tightly buttoned rose bodice matching the roses on the chip bonnet, she looked quite presentable, she admitted.

Patience, in her violet crepe with the black-velvet folds about the skirt, four deep, and her bonnet like a basket of lavender begonias, was altogether as resplendent but she declared that she would go "into fits" if Melody said any such thing, because she just looked fit for an old clothesbag and she had told Father so. And that was the only way she could get him to give her twenty dollars to spend on her wardrobe. Why people had actually been

pointing their fingers at her when she walked down the streets of Concord. Melody knew they had been! She had needed the twenty dollars. Patience was conscientious.

And now, as they strolled about on deck, it was Patience who said, "Do you, Melody, by any chance, see those two handsome gentlemen? Up there at the other end of the boat? Especially the one in brown pantaloons and the ravishing cream-colored stock? His shirt, you notice, has no ruffles. That is the very latest thing in dress, Mel, just a plain elegance. They've been glancing at us ever since we came out. Isn't it too bad in this life, the people you never meet! It is like ships that pass in the night, so sad and mournful."

Miss Patience Sheridan hoped she looked poetic and romantic as she gazed off into far distances.

"Isn't it really tragic?" she continued the heart-rending subject. "Now if we were properly introduced some place — at a sleighing party or something around Concord — wouldn't we have fun? They are both genteel; a body can tell that at a glance. I like the one in the brown pantaloons."

"Patience," Melody spoke through set lips, "if they so much as put up a brow — I shall most certainly and emphatically tell them things they ought to hear!"

"Oh, my dear, I know! I should certainly put them in their place! But can't you manage to look?"

Patience smiled at nothing and then, on second thought, pursed her mouth with gentility and dignity. She brushed at the wide black-velvet bands of the violet-crepe skirt.

Melody adjusted the rose bodice and turned carelessly, as if just casually observing the landscape. She was able also to observe the young gentlemen.

"The one in the ash-blue coat is certainly handsome," she con-

ceded, studying her glove. "When I just now happened to look he took off his hat and his hair was exactly like spun gold! Such waves!" The rose bodice fluttered on a little sigh.

It may have been the sigh or only the little breeze that ruffled the water below them or both of them together that worried the little chip bonnet. Like a bird it arose from her head and went sailing across the deck. Before she had time to cry out it was gone. Or was it gone? No, it had caught on the railing. The very blond young man was after it in a second. It was almost as if he had been watching it, and her. The bonnet held only by its ribbon. Just in time he of the ash-blue coat grasped it, amidst the cheers of all on deck. And he was coming toward her with a beaming and irresistible smile.

"Could this by any chance belong to you, Miss?" he asked innocently, as if he had not stood and stared and practically wished it off her head, it seemed, so that he might retrieve it.

Melody thanked him as well as her confusion would permit. She was put out of countenance the more by Patience's complacent and wide-eyed expression. She would have a word with that young woman when they were alone! As if she, Melody, were responsible for what the wind did! But everyone on deck seemed to think it fun so who was she to discourage Providence — wearing an ash-blue coat?

"My name is Phillip Walton," the young man introduced himself. "I am so glad I was able to rescue the lovely little bonnet. This is my friend, Mr. Silas Cady. Since there are just four of us — and alone — and there seems to be a tedious wait of our boat, why don't we all together take a walk along the towpath? I see them putting the crossing-plank out for those who wish to do so."

Dreams came true, Melody's eyes signaled to Patience. And she heard herself saying, "Why, I — I imagine you could do that.

It would be restful and pleasant to get off the boat and out of this tremendous gale."

Patience's face was aquirk with hidden laughter as the gale Melody talked of managed to lift one small, silken curl from her forehead and put it back. And she said, demurely, that she too thought it well they stroll for a little.

"It was most gallant of you to retrieve my bonnet. And thoughtful of you to suggest the walk. We were, indeed, quite tired with the tedious trip." And those were the things Miss Melody Merrill certainly told the fine young gentleman in the ash-blue coat — things that he ought to hear.

Young Patience was just as firm. She put Mr. Silas Cady, the one in the brown pantaloons, as she had declared she would, immediately in his place — beside her, with just a touch of his fingers upon her elbow. And so they set out for a pleasurable walk upon the towpath.

"I have told you my name," said the ash-blue coat to Melody, "May I know your own name please, if I am not presuming too much?"

"I am Melody Merrill. Miss Rhoda Melody Merrill. And I live not far from Boston," she told him. Now what on earth had caused her to say that? she thought immediately and guiltily. Why had she not said, right out, for fine young men and all the world to hear, that she was from near Concord, and that she was going to be a schoolteacher, a pedagogue?

She knew why! She had named Boston instead of Concord because it was bigger; it was a real city. And she had said nothing of teaching because lady teachers might be thought prosy by romantic young men. Or else strong-minded and not a bit feminine or interesting.

"Why, that's fine!" said this Phillip. "I mean, that is, that I

live near Boston, which makes us nearly neighbors. In fact, I am going down soon — well, not exactly to Boston but into that part of the country. I'll go there right after I transact some business in Philadelphia."

Patience and Mr. Silas Cady had walked on ahead and neither Melody nor Phillip had eyes for them, but now Patience turned and shouted and ran back toward them a little.

"Oh, Mel, come quickly! There's a dying man in this house, and he was kicked by a horse, in filth and poverty!" Poor Patience was incoherent in her excitement, excitement perhaps not all for dying men though, thought Melody.

Melody and Phillip hurried after the two, Melody holding her skirt and the many slightly wilted petticoats out of the mud of the canal bank. When they reached the house they found that the man was far from dying, and Patience's escort was laughing and slapping his thigh with mirth.

"Just too much from that old brown jug under the head of the bed, Miss Patience," he declared. "That's what the riffraff call being kicked by a mule, not a horse, Miss Melody." And then Phillip declared that it certainly was no place for ladies and he took Melody firmly by the arm and led her back to the boat. And every time she dared lift her own eyes he was looking down at her in the most interested fashion.

Hardly had the boat whistled importantly and made a spurt forward when it was suddenly grounded. It was too far from shore for the passengers to alight now but still in water too shallow to proceed. So all of the men took off their hats and hung up their coats and proceeded to lend a hand as if they often had the thing happen and knew just what to do. Phillip Walton was, Melody thought, even more handsome without the ash-blue

coat than he had been with it. Yes, he looked very strong and athletic as his shoulders bulged from lifting.

At first it was fun, the two girls told each other. But as the day worked up into noon and still there they sat, and as the other women and the children grew tired and became more impatient and noisy, it really was not a holiday. The wind rose in the afternoon and the boat rocked and creaked and rolled. No need to be alarmed, the crew assured everyone, because another boat must come by before too long. They might even be able to signal a big vessel upstream and if it did not pick them up itself it could send help. The *George Washington* would surely be along the next morning in any event. "The next morning — there would surely be help," they kept repeating.

The next morning! At this Patience forgot her name and began to cry, because the one in the brown pantaloons had been asleep over among some boxes and bundles since noon and it was now sundown. And it was Phillip Walton who suggested that he borrow a rowboat from the crew and take the two girls in to a small hamlet not a quarter of a mile inland.

"We could row you over there and you could spend the night in comfort, then take a stagecoach to the railroad station where you could get a train on to Philadelphia. You would have the night's rest and feel much better for it. My friend and I would bring the boat back. Men don't mind roughing it but another night like the last is too much for you young ladies, to my mind."

How thoughtful, how obliging, Melody's eyes said to Patience. But Patience wanly turned away in embarrassment. The one in the brown pantaloons was being awakened with some difficulty to help in this gallantry.

So it was that the Misses Melody Merrill and Patience Sheri-

dan now found themselves with their carpetbags and catchalls, huddled in the bottom of a slightly leaky boat, their ruffles muddy and their hair out in tags. Their teeth chattered with the cold. Even their spirits were a little dampened on their way to what Patience called a desert island.

But Melody never lost the dream, the ideal. Tall and stalwart, there he sat rowing her to safety, this handsome Phillip. High top boots that he had borrowed from the captain added to his fine appearance. He was like a viking or something. It was romantic.

Just how romantic it was she never dared hope. For when the lights of the houses on the shore were sparkling like stitches of gold embroidery upon the velvet twilight, and just a gleam of sun still flashed out upon the quiet water, Phillip stuck his oar into the sand and pulled the boat inland. Then, while the swain of Patience tried to balance himself and keep his feet dry and assist her up on the shore all at the same time, this Master Phillip reached down and lifted Melody and her poor bedraggled bonnet and all of her drooping ruffles in his arms and strode through the shallow water and to shore with her.

He set her down upon the mossy bank and he set her flowered bonnet straight and tucked a wisp of damp hair back of her little cold red ear as if she had been three years old. And he went back to the boat and got her luggage, while the bags belonging to Patience he handed over to Mr. Silas Cady to carry.

Folks in the hamlet were glad to see them. The best room in a farmhouse was offered and they were treated as guests, even though Melody made it emphatic that they were paying guests. It was an age when visitors in villages and country communities were not plentiful; folks brought news, usually, and made their own welcome. Yes, the girls were assured, a stagecoach directly

to Philadelphia would stop there at eight o'clock the next morning.

At the front stoop Phillip reached out and clasped Melody's hand in farewell. "I have enjoyed the trip, thanks to your most pleasant company, dear Miss Merrill," he said. "And I trust you ladies have not had too bad a time."

"I have never had so much fun in my life," declared Melody. "It — it has been one of the happiest times! That is — I mean I enjoyed every minute of it."

"Even your hasty and undignified plunge out of the sleeping hammock last night — or was the story that went the rounds not true?" Phillip teased.

Melody grew red and looked up at him, and he was looking at her again just as he had when he had carried her to the shore ten minutes ago, if she could tell in the twilight, and she was sure of it.

"I am very grateful for your kind assistance, Mr. Walton," she said with cool dignity. "I hope we have not put you to too much trouble." How could she have been so heedless! She arranged her skirts with shaking fingers. If Mr. Millspaugh thought she was gay then let him; she did not care one bit. But that this young Mr. Walton should think so was quite a different matter. What had come over them all, on shipboard? When he rescued the bonnet she and Patience should have thanked him primly and turned away. Now her voice was as cold as her little toes in the fine, best shoes.

Phillip Walton became grave at once. "I beg your pardon, Miss Merrill, if I have said aught that offended you. Would that I were drawn and quartered in preference! For I shall remember this day all my life and — I shall remember you. I live near Boston too, and I am going to be traveling about in the vicinity.

Perhaps I haven't told you, but with all the confusion and the boat going aground I hardly had time—" He looked at her beseechingly. "The fact is, I am greatly interested in schoolwork. I am going to a little place near Concord. I hoped to meet the selectmen there not long ago but I was detained on my last trip. Since school starts so late, I hope, however, that I have not lost the position." He paused and kept looking at her.

"Where—where was it?" Melody managed through cold little lips.

"Brier's Nest is the name of the place. Have you ever heard of it, Miss Merrill?"

CHAPTER THREE

SMOTHERED LAUGHTER

NOW, MEL, honey, I wouldn't give another thought, if I were you, to that old Phillip Walton teaching at Brier's Nest," said Patience to Melody, as they elbowed each other at the small mirror of the best bedroom in the farmhouse, next morning. "Any way, he didn't look to me as if he could teach anybody anything. Looked plumb stupid to me!"

"Why, Patience Andalusia Sheridan! What a thing to say! As far as that goes I never saw a more clever-looking gentleman in all my born days! He could and did talk most intelligently on all sorts of subjects. Did you notice? And did you notice his wavy blond hair? And that soft little place in his chin! His very lashes were nearly a yard long, looked like! And when he would laugh and kind of twinkle I thought he was the most intelligent man I had ever seen. Still and all, I wouldn't give up the school to him if he was lined with white satin and inlaid with gold—if I had gotten it. And though I may admire his looks, Patience, I don't think he would ever make a teacher. Never in all the world!"

"But he's going to be one maybe. At Brier's Nest!" declared Patience, tactlessly, as she batted her eyes before the mirror. That

phrase of Melody's about lashes a yard long had arrested her attention.

"Yes! Well, I just hope our paths never cross! That is my most earnest and heartfelt wish. Now," she said importantly, "we must go down and pay our bill."

"Yes! Oh, Mel, isn't it exciting? Just the very sound of all the things we're doing is exciting. Imagine us, way out here nearly to Philadelphia, in another state, Mel, all by ourselves, traveling along as if we had come from Europe or some place. Wouldn't Mrs. Farragut be surprised could she see one of her young ladies, Miss Patience Sheridan, if you please, tripping along with her carpetbag in hand, and up to her neck in romance? I'll be able to look down my nose at everybody in that Charm School for the rest of my life! Charm School! Charm — whom? Of course Mrs. Farragut has promised to take us all to the city but — chaperoned!"

"You're chaperoned now," said Melody, "and by a would-be schoolmarm."

"You're only six months older than I," declared Patience, "and it was the chaperon who was carried to shore in a gentleman's arms. Oh, Mel, you just looked like Mrs. Walter Raleigh last night when he lifted you up and went walking through the water. You know Sir Walter carried his wife some place — "

"No, Patience, it was not his wife. It was the queen. And he didn't carry her, in the first place. He just spread his coat down and let her walk on it."

"It must have looked a sight when he put it back on, all mud," mused Patience matter-of-factly as she gave a last push to a curl. "Well, I'll take the catchalls and you take the carpetbags and let's go down, shall we? Have you your mitts?"

For the final lap of the trip and the entrance into Philadelphia,

Melody grandly wore a black-and-lavender checked frock of persian taffeta. The sleeves were melon, of course, and there were long undersleeves of blond lace to wear below the elbow for very extra special, but these remained in the catchall, the day being warm. And Patience was every bit as fine in dark-blue satin with an arabesque figure in flame-red rioting its every breadth. The young ladies had changed hats in a spurt of ingenuity and the white chip with the roses of Melody complimented the blue-and-flame satin of Patience, while Patience's bonnet, like a basket of lavender begonias, just set off Melody's lavender checks to a tee.

"Now, Mistress Wells, we would like to settle our account if you will be so kind as to tell us what it comes to." Melody was important as the farmer's wife went into the wide veranda with them after breakfast to await the stage. When its horn sounded half a mile down the road they would walk to the crossroads and catch it as it stopped.

The farmer's wife blushed and stammered that she was sure they were welcome to her poor fare. It had not been much. She was plumb ashamed that she had not had more to offer. One of the sheets on their bed was kind of thin, she knew. And the pillows should have been aired had she known they were coming. But they had happened in so late at night. Then the butter was none too fresh, she not having had time to churn since the day before.

Still, if they insisted, why she reckoned — let's see — she did not make a practice of boarders — still — only way she knew to figger it — There was a man came through a year ago. 'Bout a year ago. Maybe not more than nine, ten months ago. Tall man, he was; had kind of sandy red hair — not just what a body would call real red. Nice man though. Right clever person. Well, he

had traveled far and wide. He said the prices round the country then was 'bout six cents a meal at taverns.* And bed the same. I think he said he paid 'round a dollar, dollar and a half for a week's put-up. Well, taking it like that, two of you ladies. And two meals and two beds, six cents apiece. Two and two and two times six—ain't that thirty-six? Now how much would that figger?"

"Two meals and two of us and only one bed," Patience interposed, justly. "That would be two and two and one—be five—"'

"Patience!" Melody the schoolmarm arched her freshly smoothed brows in dignity. "The lady is right. We owe her thirty-six cents. And here it is, madam. There's the horn; you take the catchalls and I'll take the carpetbags, Patience. I'm glad we let them take the big valises on to Philadelphia on the boat. They would have been heavy to drag along."

"Some young gentlemen might have happened 'round and lent a hand," said Patience, always hopeful. "Yes, I'm coming. Good-bye, mam!"

On the stagecoach, *Silver Arrow*, there was such a crowd that a lady was compelled to draw her skirts about her so that it looked actually forward and unseemly, said Patience's look to Melody's. But what of it, agreed both looks, crossing. Fun! They had never had so much fun in their lives.

Along they bowled, up hill and down dale. Past farmhouses. Past woods and hollows and waterfalls. Past wide green fields with prim, white-stone fences.

"It must be a lovely life, that of a hare," mused Melody. "One could skip and scamper all day and find himself as good a house by the roadside at nightfall as he had left that morning, maybe

better." Patience agreed that the life of the hare was the life for her. And as they mused thus poetically and with sentiment a wheel struck a rut, and the entire coachful found itself in a huddle on one side of the vehicle, though each had felt, up to this time, that he had not room to crook a finger.

Above them the driver writhed first one way and then the other and sawed upon his reins. "Now, gentlemen! To the right! Now, gentlemen! To the left!" he called, thus balancing his load and never minding the ladies; no gratis instruction for their safety, it seemed. And thus on the corduroy roads they fairly teetered along.

"Sakes be alive! 'Twould fair wrench the flowers from a body's bonnet! Burst the buttons from one's bodice! Make their heads jerk like they had the palsy!" complained the woman from Eagle's Knob, with the paisley shawl, as she braced herself firmly against Melody.

"Now then! Everybody out! Whole cargo of you will have to grab your valises and take your foot in your hand and walk. Bad place here for a quarter of a mile or more. If we try to ride we'll all get bogged down together, then what?" So out of the coach they all clambered and shoe-top deep in mud for at least half a mile, everybody labored. But at last, all aboard again, all merry as a marriage bell.

Some settled back to take a little snooze; it would make time pass faster. Others, having new seatmates, began long-winded stories to each other. In no time at all now, everybody told everybody else, they would come fairly rip-roaring right into the big city — and the coach promptly sank to its axles!

"Well now, everybody shell off his coat and give a hand!" commanded the driver of this *Silver Arrow* that was now up to its hilt in mud. And while the ladies complained of the try-

patience roads, all that they, themselves, had to do was to sit upon a roadside hummock and await the earnest efforts of the gentlemen toward getting the coach out of the mud and to rights again. The lady whose bonnet flowers had been loosened, whose buttons had been burst from her bodice, whose head had jerked as with palsy, took out her knitting and knitted half a sock before the trip was resumed.

On the train, again there were frequent stops, though not so many as back ten years ago or so when the trains had first started, some declared. One stop was to fill a woodcar from a woodpile on the right of way, the wood kept there especially for that purpose. The engine fairly ate wood, it seemed. Again they came to a standstill. This time the engineer ran forward and fastened down an iron top-strip that had come loose from the rails. Another wait was for a dilatory stagecoach that made connections with them.

At this delay the irate engineer strode up and down alongside the track and complained loudly and acidly. Old backwoods, he declared. Why, in some parts of the country if a stage was not there it was just not there, and the passenger could take his foot in his hand and walk, did he miss the train.

But try-patience as the trip was to some, at last it passed, and by five o'clock on the evening of the fourth day after they had started, Melody and Patience found themselves arriving at a hotel in Philadelphia. Of course they were too late to do any trading, since the shops closed at suppertime, so they hurried to prepare for bed early. They would be up with the lark tomorrow morning to see the city sights.

Their room was as large and high-ceilinged and comfortable as a bedroom in one's own home, and with its woven rag carpet, its woven spread and bright pieced quilts beneath that, it looked

not unlike their own. The closets were large, too, and the girls immediately unpacked frocks and petticoats and all the things that had ridden so tightly packed for so many miles and shook them out and spread them, as best they could, upon the nails in the closets.

"Now let us go to the Ladies' Private Convenience and wash up for bed," said Patience eagerly, as she assembled the scented soap she had brought along and the towels that hung behind the big, flowered water pitcher on the commode, and led the way. The maid had proudly shown them this modern convenience door when she had taken them up to their room that afternoon. But as Patience flung the door open importantly, she sprang back. She motioned and whispered loudly for Melody to hurry on. Melody lagged a little. She wondered if her house wrapper were just exactly the correct thing for a lady to be wearing about public halls, so near bedtime.

"Look, Mel! Look what's in here!" Patience hissed. "Well, did you ever? As sure as ever I told it if there isn't a bathtub in here! Hurry! Come look! It's the most elegant thing I ever saw in all my born days!"

Melody looked too. It was, indeed, all that Patience declared it. It was like a big coffin, a copper one if they ever came in copper. Tin spouts set into the wall above the tub let the water into it. And a hole like some folks had in their kitchen sinks to let the dishwater drain out into the meadow or some such place was at one end. This hole had a tin lid that fitted into it like a bucket lid.

"Get in, Melody, and let's shut the door. Somebody might see us."

"Not with my clothes on," Melody giggled.

"I mean come into the room, silly!"

They shut the door and tried the spigots. Water spurted

spiritedly from one and dripped dishearteningly from the other.

"Oh me," Patience breathed, "let's take us a bath in it! Mel, it would add just the very last straw to our story to tell the girls at home if we could just take us a bath in that tub! Why we would be the green-eyed envy of every other girl in Mrs. Farragut's Charm School!"

Melody threw back her head and laughed as loudly as she dared. "Yes! Mrs. Farragut would put a set of washtubs in her very parlor and start giving lessons on the most genteel way for a lady to take her bath! She would have them all running about with wet feet and towels over their arms; hair all in wet wisps and—" Her voice broke off in mirth, and the two girls sat on the edge of the tub and laughed till the tears ran.

"But, Melody, let's do!" Patience urged. "I guess we're the only ones for miles around Concord who ever even saw a bathtub, let alone put their legs right over the edge and got plumb in right up to their neck in water and washed in it."

Melody still sat there giggling. "'Now, Patience Andalusia, don't be bold,' your mother would say. And mine too, for that matter. But—I'll be bold enough to try it if you are!"

There were stealthy trips back and forth to the big bedroom because Melody's scented soap was different from Patience's small, fragrant bar; they would each use a little of each. And the washrags which had ignobly ridden in the very bottom of the catchall, pieces from somebody's knitted undershirt—another trip for them. And all of this with much door-listening and smothered laughter.

"'Smothered laughter, young ladies, is a better expression than giggles; try to remember that,'" quoted Patience. "That's what Mrs. Farragut always tells us in Charm School." But when both bathtub spouts were turned on at once and there seemed no

effective manner of regulating them, the girls' laughter could scarcely have been called smothered. Yes, one spout spurted forth geyserlike and the other continued its dribble. It was the hot-water one, of course, that dribbled.

When Miss Patience, at last having undressed, put her legs right over the edge of the tub as she had said she would, she did not get into the water plumb up to her neck, as she had anticipated. Far from it! For with both the dribbling and the spouting, little more water than enough to fair chill one to the bone was forthcoming. But her face was all abeam with happiness. A body was in a bathtub, was she not? If chills rode up and down a small spine who was to say if they were chills of cold or chills of ecstatic adventure?

"Well, I just guess Miss Philadelphia got down off her high horse and pulled in her horns," commented Melody as she combed her fine, long hair before the mirror and awaited her turn. "Just ten years ago or about that — 1836 I think it was — this city cut an awful dido at the very idea of having bathtubs. Wouldn't hear of them under any conditions. They even passed a city ordinance against them."

"Did they think they were immoral, Melody?" asked Patience, who now shiveringly gave way with the tub and looked as if she were glad to do so.

"Well, everybody said they were unsanitary. I don't know whether they thought them immoral or not. Maybe they did."

"Wonder if they could have been thought both. Which would you rather be, Melody — moral or modern?" Patience was getting into the long drawers that she had packed in case of chilliness in Philadelphia, and into her high-necked "shimmy." And she would further get into her corsets, her six ruffled muslin petticoats, her basque and her skirt, her hair snood and her high

buttoned boots, for the thirty-foot trip from the Ladies' Private Convenience to their room.

But the house wrapper, corsets and such underneath, of course, sufficed for bold Miss Melody and the trip back down the hall was made in secret and with much smothered laughter. Again the girls disrobed and got snugly into the big flannel nightgowns. With the crisply starched ruffles of their nightcaps making their faces look like the pink heart of some big, white flower, each tried quickly for sleep so that the exciting activities of the following day might come sooner.

Patience's soft breathing soon told Melody that she was asleep but she, herself, lay for a while staring into the darkness, the quiet. Now if she had been given the school she could have told the children about the wonders of travel and city life and such things. But there she was, thinking about that school again, when she should be thinking of nothing except what a wonderful time she was having. Mighty few girls ever had a trip like this! If their parents had been narrow-minded and old-fashioned, neither would she and Patience, she mused.

Still, just to run about, to "gallivant" as Mistress Schoolmaster Snodgrass would have said, really was not as much fun as—well, as doing something one really wanted to do. Even if it was hard. Even if it was work, she decided. And her last waking thought, perhaps strangely, was not of the big city of Philadelphia but of that little hamlet of Brier's Nest, out a way from Concord.

Melody scarcely stirred as she heard the cry in the middle of the night: "Watchman! Twelve o'clock! A cloudy night and all's well!"

CHAPTER FOUR

SLOW FIRE ENGINES AND FAST CORSETS

THE TWO girls were awakened the next morning by the cry of the man who brought round the vessels of milk and the morning's hot bread and left them upon the doorsteps. He left the newspaper, too, for the few who read so early in the morning or for those who saved their paper to read in the evening.

"Hot — hot — hot — breads for sleep — ee — y heads!" he sang in a sad cadence that gave a sort of eeriness to the dawn. Both girls sprang out of bed and Melody looked down into the street from the small-paned window which had been wide open to the breeze, insects, or possible burglars, throughout the night.

"My goodness, Patience!" Melody exclaimed. "To see Philadelphia like this in broad day it looks lots more important than Boston; I have to admit it. The streets anyway seem twice as wide."

"Oh, I think so too, Melody!" Patience agreed, with her nightcap beside Melody's. "Do you know, Mel, I think I will come to Philadelphia to live some day? Concord is so little and old-fashioned. Country bumpkins, they call people from such little places."

"Well, Brier's Nest is even smaller than Concord so I guess if I had been given the school and taught there I could have been called a country bumpkin. But I should not have minded. Even that Phillip Walton, if he does get it — would you say he looks like a bumpkin of any kind?"

"Oh, Mel! You know I think he's one of the two handsomest gentlemen in this whole wide world. And the stylisthest! But don't you worry, honey. You'll see him again."

"Well, I certainly hope I never shall, in all my born days, and I hope you don't think I'm worrying, either. About not getting the school I am, of course. But about nothing else! Nothing else and nobody on this good, green earth!"

"Should we — do you think we should get into that bathtub for our baths this morning?" asked Patience, deeming it wise to change the subject. "It seemed so kind of cold, and one spout dribbled. Or should we just — ?"

Melody thought that they should "just." And so, with flowered bowl and pitcher and with the big can of hot water they found just outside their door — this hotel furnished all modern conveniences in spite of newfangled bathtubs — their ablutions were performed more casually and informally than they had been the night before.

"I guess bathtubs are experiences more than conveniences anyway," Melody declared, lathering her washrag well with both cakes of the fine scented soap.

Then there was the breakfast in the hotel. It was as large as any they would have had on a farm but it was served with such elegance! One would hardly believe. The silver dishes were so hot you could feel the heat on your hand as the waiter held it close and ladled the food generously right onto your plate for you. All that you had to do was pick up a fork. And the forks

elegantly had three tines, as Patience called to Melody's attention.

"Just set your two eyes on these forks, honey," she whispered. "Three prongs instead of two!" Patience was already dissatisfied with humble Concord.

"Now let's hurry out to the stores and do our trading, Patience, then on over to the Wills-Moody store and see it."

"See what, Melody? Oh, yes, that newfangled machine, of course. Well, I'll just eat my prunes and my dried-apple pie and let the custard go; I can't waste time eating. They say it is the most wonderful thing that ever was!"

"They say, the papers say, that it could revolutionize the whole country, but I think that statement could be taken with a grain of salt."

"Yes; well, have you the list of things you want to buy, Mel, so we won't forget? I put another item on my list every time I take it out of my reticule. I had only six things down when we started and now I have nineteen."

"Me, too," said Melody, "but one thing I didn't write down is a pair of hoops. Everybody for a while said they were going out and so I just managed with my old ones. But there, last month's *Godey's* said they were going to be more stylish and more stand-outish than ever, this year and next. And the last fashion doll had them larger than ever, that I know."

"But fashion dolls are kind of out, with *Godey's* and two-three other women's magazines with pictures and directions to make and all, coming every month," Patience pointed out.

As the two girls swished up the stairs after their bonnets and reticules and carryalls there was such a clatter in the street as they had seldom heard. Quickly they ran to the window and stuck out their heads.

A fire engine dashed and sputtered and smoked and plunged

forward a foot and slipped back a foot and triumphantly raced forward again several feet. It clanged its bell and it shrilled its whistle. And the firemen upon it looked daring and brave. Yes, they swung their hats in acknowledgement of the honor paid them by all onlookers as if they well knew that honor their bounden due, as they rode right down the middle of the paved sidewalk of Philadelphia to the fire across the city.

Everybody in the streets, children, men and women, and dogs, ran after them. And it was only the dignity of the two traveling ladies that made them gather the backs of their skirts in their small, mittened hands and quietly descend the stairs into the street, as if Concord, Massachusetts, put on a fire daily with nobody batting an eye.

"I think if you're going to buy hoops I will too, Melody," Patience now decided. "Let's get them first and have them off our minds." But when they had them off their minds they found they had them in their arms, and there they stood in the middle of a Philadelphia sidewalk, the storekeeper having rushed the sale, locked the store door and taken out, full tilt, in the direction the fire engine had gone.

"Oh, Melody Merrill, what on earth shall we do? My face is as red as a turkey gobbler's snout, I guess. I can feel it hot as fire! We must look like birds in a cage. And look at those gentlemen over there laughing. They're actually looking this way and laughing!" Patience fumed but with that sweet fuminess that Melody had observed when gentlemen, anywhere, anytime, laughed at her.

"I never was so put to shame in all my born days, Mc! Right out here in the middle of Philadelphia with a set of hoops for all to see." The metal skirt frames, small at the top and flaring at

the bottom, did, indeed, look like huge bird cages—but much more embarrassing.

“Well, it could be worse,” Melody comforted through her laughter. “Anyway, it’s not a pair of woolen drawers over our arms. So who cares? Come along. Let’s take them over to the hotel and leave them while we buy our shoes.”

When the two young ladies had disposed of their unwieldly purchases and entered the next store they saw bolts of muslin and flannel and flowered oil calico upon the wall shelves. And upon tables and counters there were porcelains and kitchen-ware and candles and the like for household use. Churns, jars, sleigh bells mounted in rows upon leather harness, shovels. But none of these held their eyes. And just now Miss Melody Merrill could scarcely contain her excitement as a young man, dignified, with folded arms and lifted brows, came down behind the counter to wait upon her.

“May I be so bold as to offer my poor services, my dear young ladies?” he asked with the greatest deference, the utmost abasement of the good salesman.

“We, sir, should like to see the new shoes that have become so stylish. The kind—one is just exactly for the left foot and will not fit the right foot. But each is made exactly for the right foot,” said Melody, primly. Backwoods Massachusetts or not, Philadelphia should see that Concord knew what was afoot.

“Oh, you mean, dear madam, those shoes that were patented just last year? The kind where the right shoe will not fit the left foot because it was made for the right foot and the left shoe will not fit the right foot because it was made for the left foot? But pardon your mistake, madam, each is not made for the right foot as you say. Only one is made for the right foot and

the other is made for the wrong foot—I mean for the other foot."

"That is exactly what I do mean!" declared Melody spiritedly, at what looked like a slight rebuff.

"Miss—esteemed madam—I would not advise you to throw your money away on such newfangled stuff. Just a fiddle-faddle, this new-style shoe. I know it is all the go some places but it cannot last. And you have a kind face, Miss—you would not want it to last."

"Well why on earth not?" inquired Melody.

"Would you, Miss—Is it Miss? You have the beauty of the maid; the dignity of the matron—would you, for the sake of false vanity, wish to throw the thousands of poor, downtrod, underhecl cobblers, who make their shoes in their own door-yards or small outbuildings, cobblers who have no new patent lasts for right foot or the wrong foot—I mean no lasts like we went into a while ago—would you like to see them standing idle? Out of business? Shivering and hungry? It is for that reason I cannot show you this newfangled shoe. And besides—we haven't any."

Melody fairly flounced out of the store and Patience, of course, flounced after her. There were plenty of stores in this big city. One did not have to take any check, one hoped, Melody fumed. They would simply go elsewhere.

As the girls strolled down the street, swinging their reticules and carryalls as if they had been born and reared in this big city and lived only around the corner, they observed a shop window with a sign: *Men's suits already made.* They stopped and looked at the garments with interest.

"Do you know, Patience, I can remember when Nath used to have his suits made by measure. They did not make them

like that, just ready to step in and buy, even ten years ago. Doesn't the world progress?"

"Yes. But I wonder who ever thought it up," mused Patience.

"Well, I guess it all started from making the sailors' uniforms in quantities and all alike. So that put the idea into the manufacturer's heads to make all the men's suits alike. I was reading something about it just the other day and that's what it said. And it's lots handier and goodness knows they look lots handsomer. I've heard Gramma Ploutz say that she used to sit down and stitch up two suits apiece every two years for her husband and her six boys, every one. Well, now let's go in here and do our trading. But don't let's get everything here. I like to look around in all the shops. I wish we could get the shoes though, but I don't see shoes in this window. If they had the new kind they would be showing them off."

"Yes. And you know what else we want to get, Melody—you know!" Eyes met eyes in secret understanding. The two young ladies walked briskly right past the storekeeper and approached a young and befrilled lady in the rear of the store. With averted face and a half-guilty look at a man who was being waited on, she ushered them into a curtained alcove.

"Corsets?" she asked. "Yes, indeed, Misses. I have the finest line of corsets that can be found upon the back of nobility today. I have in a brand-new shipment, just this morning. Corsets, I always say, are necessary to make a lady—any lady, mind you, no matter how shapely she may be—still a tight corset will make her stick out where she should stick out and help her to hold in where she should hold in. This foolishness of wearing no corsets at all and having to hold a body's breath all the time is going to be the ruination of the nation or I don't know beans when the bag is untied."

All of us being beans, thought Melody, when the bag—or the corset—is untied. But the befrilled lady had more to say.

"Now me, when I see a lady walking downstreet with her eyes glazed and her teeth gritted, I say to myself, 'No corsets! Doing it all with her cheeks! Holding in!' And I fair feel like giving her a smack to make her let out."

Now she was showing large, white, cambric cages reinforced with steel strips all around. They were made the exact shape of an hourglass, except that the hours would have had to be full and well-rounded, both top and bottom. "Let a lady get herself into one of these, then with a set of nice hoops to flare her out below the waist, it will bolster her quite a bit. And—look at this one; isn't this elegant?" She daringly displayed one that had a blue-satin bow right between the two—well—the two top portions.

"Now I had me one in the other day that you ought to have seen," declared the saleswoman. "Of course it wasn't anything you girls would want, being so young, or that any respectable woman of any age, for that matter, would want. It was fast! We take orders for these gay show girls, you know. I don't like to, but still and all, a body has to cater to what the public wants. Well, I showed it to everybody who came in—and in the afternoon we never did have such a big business in woman's trade. Never in all the years! You see this was a red corset, mind you! A red-silk one, if you please. And frills of lace and ribbon both top and bottom. And the top—stead of pulling in, it stood out! Now here is a mighty fine little corset."

"But," said Melody, "that one looks so stiff and so—so—"

"Like a strait jacket I saw in the paper the other day! Like a steel trap!" declared Patience.

"I mean—" said Melody, "Mrs. Hale was just saying in last

month's *Godey's Book* that corsets should not have steel. She said that steel in corsets was for the deformed and the diseased."

"Whoop! Mrs. Hale, is it?" The saleswoman was all ridicule. "Well, now you run around some place and get you a good look at Mrs. Hale! If a body ever saw proud vanity with long shiny curls pulled over the shoulders, they see it in her! And always a fine frilly kerchief crossed where it will do the most good in calling the attention of the eye! And a waist pushed in and hips pushed out! That's your Mistress Hale!"

"Do you think the Lord made her hips like twin puddings round a little pudding-stick of a waist? No, this fine Mrs. Hale advises other ladies to spread themselves. But while they're doing that, she will be twisting her corset strings round her bedpost and walking off with all the compliments in the country, about her beauty as well as her brains, if you don't mind!"

"I'll take the boned corsets, please," said Melody, meekly. And further to follow Mistress Hale, but not her advice, both Patience and Melody then and there bought themselves each as fine and glossy a curl-cluster as the store could produce. Black for Melody and light brown for Patience.

Melody also bought ten yards of rosy woolen material. It had little dashes of silvery frost upon it and under one's hand it felt as soft as flower petals. It had been for her new school that she had first planned to buy some goods. It would be an emblem, she had thought, an emblem of bright, happy days for her and all the children at Brier's Nest, together. They would love a bit of charm and cheer on drab, rainy days and some brilliant color on snowy ones, she had thought. The back should be swept up in a high-hipped effect and that would lend her both dignity and elegance. Well, she would buy it anyway, school or no school. The merchant not only threw in, free for nothing,

as he virtuously pointed out, a card of hooks and eyes, but enough cardboard for stiffening a sunbonnet.

Then down the store they stopped by a table of dishes. A blue and white set was priced at twenty-five cents. And there were more expensive, white granite-china ones. Also brightly japanned, tin pepperboxes and tea caddies, steel knives and forks and tin and iron spoons.

Melody would have bought the twenty-five cent set of dishes for her mother but Patience pointed out they would make quite an armload, with reticules and carpetbags and catchalls and hoops. So no set of china dishes to chaperone around on the trip home, bargain or no bargain, Melody reluctantly decided.

"Now," she said at last, when they were positively bowed down under brown-paper parcels, "we will take our stuff to the hotel and then we will go to this Wills-Moody store and see it."

Over at the Wills-Moody store "it" was a model of the new-fangled sewing machine that Elias Howe had invented just this year. Two of what was declared to be exact replicas of this wonderful machine were to be seen in Philadelphia this week. Much about the machine had been published in the various newspapers. Some said it was the work of the devil and would be the ruination of the country. Others, there were, who declared that it spelled progress for the nation; it heralded achievement, in not only one but many trades. The men, it seemed, had more to say about it in the papers than had the women. But of course women seldom came right out and expressed their views publicly in print on any subject, and on this subject they were particularly reluctant. Did they want to have the papers calling them lazy, and do-nothings, glad to get a machine to do their own sacred, homely duties?

And it was the men who had the floor in the Wills-Moody

store this morning. At least a dozen of them clustered around the infernal machine. Two or three women besides Melody and Patience drew as close as they modestly could and looked on.

Then the storekeeper sat himself down and importantly placed a small piece of cloth upon the surface of the machine, just below the needle. He put his hand to the wheel on top of the machine. The wheel was about twelve inches in diameter. He gave it a swing. Nothing happened. No machinery moved beneath his hand. No seam was sewed. The men guffawed and slapped each other upon the back. It was just as they had thought, a newfangled, no-good contraption.

The storekeeper rose, walked to the stairs and called, "Tabitha, you come down here, you ain't got your hands in the dough or something, and show them how to run this here machine."

A small woman hurried down. She wiped her hands on her blue apron as she came and she sat herself down at the machine. She readjusted the piece of goods, two edges together and, with all the might of her spare little arms and shoulders and feet, she set the large wheel on top in motion and the treadle running.

There! That woman was a teacher! Melody suddenly thought it; with her worried brow and her little chapped hands, she showed them how. She taught somebody what they ought to know, what would make things easier for them if they did know. A surge of earnest longing swept the girl. She, too, must teach. She, also, must help people to know. It was important to teach. Anywhere. Anyhow. It was important to teach anybody anything!

Clickety-clack! Clickety-clack! The machine began rather uncertainly, the little weather-beaten woman giving it all her concentration, all her power. Melody giving all her strong desire to see her succeed, willing it to her. Saying to her, silently but

with all her heart, across these doubting others, that it was more than a seam that she sewed.

In fifteen minutes she had sewed a seam that many inches long and of more or less regularity of stitch. She held it up triumphantly for all to see. A row of chain stitch had been evolved, each single stitch of such size that a nail might have been inserted beneath it.

"Now, lookey there!" cried the storekeeper. "And that ain't nigh as good as the real one will be, once they get it on the market. That's only a model, kind of thrown together, to show roundabout."

"Yes! Lookey there!" jibed a farmer. "If any woman ever handed me a shirt sewed up like that I'd let her wear it herself!" He grabbed at the length of goods and caught hold of the thread. The woman impulsively pulled it back and the entire thread remained in the farmer's hand while the goods now had no seam in it at all. This caused loud guffaws from the male audience, including the storekeeper, himself.

"No, sir, like I said, it's too complicated for a woman in the first place. Too many gewgaws. It would take a man to run one of them," bragged a man, ignoring the trend the demonstration had just taken.

"Not only that! The way I look at it it would put a whole lot of poor widow women and old maids out of work. Half the families roundabout has one or more old maids who goes out to sew for her keep. No sewing, machines do it all, who's going to keep her? Her sister's man? Her daughter's husband?"

"There probably wouldn't be no daughter," somebody pointed out and the speaker agreed grudgingly. "But anyway it looks like a dangerous contraption. First thing might happen, a body could get an arm or a leg tore plumb off," he argued.

"We all thought them Lowell Mills was the country's ruination, and they did hit some mighty hard. But I'm here to tell you that a sewing-machine contrivance would blow the prosperity of this country all to thunder!" the man lifted his voice on the last word and glared down at Melody suddenly, as if she and not Elias Howe had thought up the machine before them.

"These are only makeshift things that somebody rigged up, anyway, Martin. May never go through. Howe ain't even got his patent, they tell me." And this made Martin feel so much better that he sliced himself a slab of cheese that lay at convenience upon the counter and ate it in two bites.

"But — where a woman has a big family — if this machine is like the papers say, she could get sewing done up and have time for other things, maybe," suggested one of the women to the room at large.

"For what other things?" contended Martin, with a mouthful of cheese. "What else is there for her to do but keep house and raise a family? That's her place. Ain't I right, young lady?" He had drawn quite close to Melody and now he looked down upon her admiringly.

Miss Melody Merrill, who hoped to be a teacher, scandalous as women teachers were said by some to be, lifted her shoulders. She lifted her small and well-arched brows. And she lifted her shapely nose.

"What else is there for a woman to do besides housekeep?" She addressed the man directly, with a glare. "There are, sir, a hundred million things! And some day we are going to do them every one, as you will see if you don't have some dire accident that takes you off soon — like choking on cheese! Or getting your neck hooked up in a woman's sewing-machine stitches!"

And with that Melody turned and strolled through the store

and out of the door with a swing of the hips that even the fine, boned corset, just bought that morning, was going to do little toward restraining. And her good and admiring friend, Miss Patience Sheridan, came immediately after.

At the hotel Melody found a letter from her mother; it was the first letter she had ever received. In fact, because letters were so rare her mother had written this one on the very day that Melody had left home. It said:

My dear Daughter:

We are all well and hope you are the same. Melody there came a letter for you. I don't know who it is from. I thought you ought to know.

So Melody was to receive her second letter. "Oh, Patience!" Melody held this one out breathlessly for her friend to read. "Maybe it's from — you can't tell — it might be from — Oh, Patience! It will be good to get home!"

CHAPTER FIVE

PA DIDN'T LIKE LAUGHING

AH, IT was an exciting home-coming from Philadelphia, and before Melody had scarce laid off her bonnet and mantle her mother handed her the letter. She tore it open eagerly. It might be — it could be from Phil — from somebody she knew.

But when she looked at the signature her heart dropped. It was signed by Silas Matthew Millspaugh. But then her heart bounced right back again when she read the words he had written. They were many and set forth in most decorative style. Yes, his every S and P wore tail feathers of fine and elaborate flourishes which swept down into the lines below and soared up into the lines above with utter abandon. As further embellishment every *i* wore a ring above it. His idea of a dot — or maybe the rings for reminders of his proposal, Melody thought grimly.

But it was a lovely letter! Though in formal and prosy style it said, definitely, that she was to have the school at Brier's Nest. And at the end, which was signed, *I beg, my most esteemed and respected madam, to sign myself always your obedient servant, Silas Matthew Millspaugh*, an entire half sheet of foolscap had been allowed for the final elegance, scarce as foolscap was.

Yes, here upon the snow-white surface of a three-quarter page rested further proof of Brother Millspaugh's education. It was the drawing of a bird's nest in the bough, with the mother bird hovering near. Tail feathers and bough branches mingled indiscriminately.

From this business letter Melody learned that she would begin her term of teaching the second week in November. It was customary in the country schools to begin later, since many of the older children had their duties on the farm, through the fall harvest. But the children were all small at Brier's Nest or else their parents were so poor they had no farms and made do with a little truck-patch, Millspaugh pointed out. Of course his five would attend; he was a man who knew the worth of education, he hoped. Besides, Sylvester was too small to stay at home by himself. The two older boys were, he knew, too big to be wasting their time sitting around in a schoolhouse with books. Still, with all this church work on his hands, he never had got around to making them buckle down to farming.

For her services Melody would receive the munificent sum of six dollars per month. This information had been given with many shadings and reshadings of letters by a reluctant pen. Six dollars a month was a good deal of money to offer anybody — to offer a woman. At that rate, he explained, the Briar's Nest school could be maintained for four months. Had they paid her eight dollars a month it could have been maintained only three months. And he carefully explained in postscript headed *Another Thing*, that was mighty good pay for a woman teacher. That was one reason she was getting the school. A man teacher would have cost the school at least ten dollars a month.

So three days before school was to be "called" Melody and Louisa Alcott and Patience Sheridan rode up to Brier's Nest

in the carryall to put the schoolhouse in order. In the carryall were pails and brooms and rags and matches and things with which to do a good job of cleaning. And there was also a hearty lunch to be warmed upon the heating stove. Patience flourished a broom threateningly above the haunches of old Gospel Bearer — or Back Slider, as Nath had once renamed him. The old horse spent most of his years now in a south pasture or a good warm barn and he lagged along at his own convenience. And there was laughter and much singing on the way.

Now on the first Monday morning of Melody's teaching she and Louisa Alcott were on their way to Brier's Nest in the early dawn. Louisa drove while Melody quickly took a last look into this book and that one. She wore the elegant rosy wool dress for First Day.

"Do you know, Louisa, you should not have come along. I'll be ashamed to stand up and try to teach before you. You know more than I do even if you are only thirteen years old. With your father's clever friends in the house, why you could just absorb education and need never go from home to learn."

"I know enough to know that I don't know much," Louisa told her. "I'll keep the fire going. I'll sweep out and mend the quill-pens and keep the water buckets filled. Anyway, I'll come when I want to and stay at home when I like, not being a Brier's Nester, anyway. But it's going to be fun and I don't want you to have it all to yourself."

"You always put stiffening in my petticoats, Lou, that makes me stand up when I feel like falling down. I don't know what I would do without you. I'm so glad you moved back to Concord."

The girls drove into the pasture surrounding Brier's Nest schoolhouse by the time it was "good light."

"Look, Louisa! Look at the beautiful frosty carpet all over the pasture. It's too fine for heavy folks like us to step upon. It is fit only for the soft-footed creatures of the fields, themselves." And the two girls, forgetting the long, cold miles they had ridden, and forgetting the bleak and empty schoolhouse awaiting their fire and their warming talk and laughter, stood there together and looked across the frosty stubble field, adoring it.

"The stubble, all glistening frost, is as beautiful as the green grass was last summer, Lou. Don't you think so? Now there — Lou! That's what I want to show the children. That's what I want to teach them. That everything, anyway almost everything, has its own beauty. And worth. It's not that I just want to teach them how to cipher and spell, but there are so many other things in the world, just going to waste, that I want them to know about — and see. Some of them never can have much except such as this, that they find themselves; I want to help them find it. Do I talk so you understand me at all, Lou, honey?"

"Yes, I know what you mean, Mel, but one of the first lovely things we ought to show them is a good, hot stove," said the practical Louisa, humorously and dryly. And she grabbed bundles and ran to the schoolhouse while Melody tethered old Gospel Bearer to a rail fence. The horse cast disconsolate looks at the frosted stubble. He would have much preferred it green.

Melody took her remaining bundles and her books and hastened in after Louisa. Together they lit a fire in the big-bellied heating stove and gave things a last touch. Brier's Nest schoolhouse must have had a big surprise when Miss Melody Merrill got hold of it. Now here, this morning, it sat resplendent with a cleanly scrubbed and shining floor. Puncheon seats and desks had been rubbed with a coal-oil rag, and crisp, white curtains

hung at every one of the six windows, if you please! The stove was now getting red on one side and it hummed and crackled cheerily. Ah, there would be fun here, Melody told herself. Fun and love and cheer. And education, of course.

And scarcely had the girls taken another look round and removed their cloaks and bonnets when the first student arrived. He was about seven years old and he wore a linsey-woolsey suit and a woolen hood, but no shoes. He carried a tin bucket which the girls knew contained his lunch.

"Well, good morning!" Melody greeted him. "I'm the new teacher. My name is Melody Merrill. Will you tell me your name?"

"Name's Sylvester Millspaugh," said the boy. "Milly and Sarah and Abner and Joseph, they're coming back a ways. I come ahead. They said you was an old woman teacher and we was going to have fun. Abner, he's going to put a live turtle in your desk. A big one."

And now came the four older Millspaughs. Milly, the younger girl, was about twelve and she carried a huge withe basket covered with an old, clean apron. Melody was to learn that this basket, carried always by Milly, came every day and contained the cold dinner of the entire Millspaugh clan, to be supplemented by more from the bucket that Sylvester carried.

Sarah Millspaugh was perhaps a year older than Milly, and Joseph and Abner had the faces of boys fifteen and fourteen but they were man-sized, and they wore hickory shirts and coarse breeches stuffed into cowhide shoes. Abner had no bulges on him to indicate a concealed turtle, Melody was glad to observe. That would, doubtless, come later.

Now the other children began arriving, and all in the same manner. There would be shouts and a hurried scurrying across

the ditch from the Big Road, through the yard and up to the very door, in breathless anticipation of seeing the new woman teacher. But when the door opened and they showed themselves it was in bashful silence.

Two boys the size of the Millspaughs came swaggering in with much stamping of feet and slapping down of hands upon desks and a general clatter of getting seated. They would only give their names as Dave and Tobe. With much sniggering they refused to tell Melody their surnames.

"Their name is Moody," Sarah Millspaugh explained with great disdain. "They're hardshells." Melody could see that at a glance, unfamiliar as she was with hardshells. She hoped that the remainder of her class would be younger.

"Shore are hardshells!" confirmed Tobe, as he beat a bit of dirt from his boot. "Us, we got a licking every day last term. Dave, he got it one day and me the next. Old Joe and Abner would get it more too, if their Pa wasn't on the Board. Tom Scarrett wore switches out on our britches thick as my little finger."

Poor Melody looked at Louisa and then she looked at the children who sat before her. She looked at the white curtains and the cozy, warm stove. She had hoped they might all have a nice time together. But this seemed a poor beginning. So she looked long at Louisa and again back at Tobe.

"Tom's switches were only the size of your little finger? I —" she said, "never even cut a switch smaller than my middle finger!" She maintained her steady stare at Tobe and at last he dropped his eyes. But he boldly scuffed his cowhide boots to tell them all he was not afraid of an old woman teacher.

"Us — we don't like school. We like to farm. Pa aimed to teach us till he got this religious bee in his bonnet. Me and

Abner, we ain't so good at ciphering and spelling but—I bet you we can shuck more corn a day than any man in this here county!" That was Joseph Millspaugh and Melody's heart for some reason immediately lifted up and all but sang. Perhaps it was because she detected just a note of longing to be liked, to be appreciated, in all his belligerence. So she was not the only one in the room at the moment who needed helping; perhaps they could help each other.

"Now," she said, "let us see if everyone has brought his books and slate. You may gather the slates and lay them on my desk if you will, please." She pointed to a little pale girl who sat constantly wiping the coarse, red hair out of her small face and devouring Melody with her eyes. Her feet were bare.

"What is your name? Will you tell me, now?" Melody asked her.

"I'm Jody Mullins. I ain't got shoes 'cause Pa's been too busy. But he'll make them. I'll have them for Christmas."

"Oh, Jody, how nice! Brand-new shoes for Christmas! I wish I were having new ones then. But until you do get them I want you and Sylvester Millspaugh, there, to sit near the stove."

"Ves ain't got shoes on 'cause he won't wear them. My Pa owns half of this here Brier's Nest and we could throw shoes at the gophers if we wanted to!" bragged Sylvester's brother Joseph, without asking recognition of teacher.

Melody knew that they well could—and never miss a lick because the neglected Millspaugh farm grew little but gophers, with its lord and master roundabout camp meetings and such most of his time.

But she only said, "I am sure that Sylvester is well able to have shoes. But now let us get the slates up to my desk. After that

we will do some reading, and we can see just how much everyone has studied."

The entire class of twelve members was of different ages and intellect and, since there was no grading, this made it hard for the teacher. Melody had planned to put her pupils in two separate sections so the more advanced might be in one group and the smaller ones in another. But this, she was soon to find, would work neither to the satisfaction of herself nor her pupils.

She decided that by having them read aloud she could best determine, offhand, just where each should be. At least temporarily. Later, when she had worked with them a while, she could judge better the capabilities of each.

"Now let us all open our books," she said. "I will read the beginning of the first lesson and you, Tobe, starting there in the back and coming right down the line, may each read a succeeding paragraph."

Melody read from McGuffey's:

*"Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go."*

"Now you continue, Tobe."

Loudly and importantly boomed Tobe's growing, masculine voice:

*"In the burying ground may see
Graves shorter than I;
From Death's arrest no age is free,
And so, may such an awful sight
Awakening be to me."*

*Oh, that by early grace I might
For Death prepared to be."*

A girl in front of Tobe took it up before he had scarcely left off. Eagerly and hopefully, she chanted:

*"Amidst our cheer
Death may be near.
All shortly must
Be laid to dust."*

read little Harriet Buford, gaily.

*"By Adam came
Our sin and shame.
Our parents fell
And we rebell!"*

In singsong they read, some of them not even looking upon the printed page. And when the child with whom Louisa Alcott was sharing a book, looked up at her in invitation to read, Louisa first cast one of her humorous glances at Melody and she read, as if on Doom's Day:

*"The Earth must burn
And Christ return.
What then will hide
The sons of Pride?"*

Melody caught her eye and they both burst into laughter. The children gasped. They had never before, in all their lives, heard a teacher—a man teacher—laugh during spelling or reading or ciphering time. But it seemed a fine thing to do so they all joined in. Especially did little Jody Mullins rock with

mirth and snuggle her little bare feet under her with an ecstatic movement as if she had found fun where she never expected to.

"My Pa — he won't like all this laughing!" admonished Abner Millspaugh. "I never saw no teacher laughing in class. And letting the young'uns, too! Pa, he says teachers has got to earn their money. He's on the Board."

"Yes, I know," said Melody, and she could not refrain another secret glance at Louisa. "But here, let me look at your books. There is something wrong somewhere. They all seem different." And when she turned to the front of Milly's book she found that it was the *Youth's Primer*. It had been published back in 1817, almost thirty years before, by a Jonathan M. Fisher, A. M., at Bluehill, Maine. But nobody else had a Fisher. Some had one thing and some had another. Melody, herself, had been educated from these sad texts but now, as she looked at them and at the youngsters, the books seemed to contain all that she hoped never to teach them or any child.

"Well, children, I don't think we shall be able to use these books," she said at last. "I think we shall use McGuffey's. It is a much later and better book. I wish you would ask your parents to get McGuffey's for you, and each get just a year ahead of what you studied last year. If you were in second grade, get third reader this year. Ebenezer Farragut down at Concord will send for them for you."

Some of the children looked dubious and others shook their heads emphatically. It was Tobe Moody who informed this old woman teacher that some of the young ones' folks did not hold much with their book learning anyway. And they would not buy books when the ones their children had were not worn out. Not half worn out.

"I suppose that is true," said Melody, as if she attached much

importance to what Tobe had said. "So perhaps we shall have to manage with some looking on with others. Because I do know that McGuffey's is the best book and we ought to use only the best."

"Pa'll be agin new books," declared Abner Millspaugh.

"Well, now, I don't think he will, Abner. I'm sure that every one of you Millspaugh children will have a McGuffey's, your father being such a progressive man. And being right on the school board, too. He would want to be first to set a fine example before his neighbors, I know."

Louisa Alcott sat there with her tongue in her cheek and her keen eyes shone with mirth and pride at Melody's management. Melody would get along!

At noon that first day they all opened their dinner buckets and baskets and sat around the stove. It was then that Sarah Millspaugh said, "Pa — he said you was to stay roundabout and that you should come home with us, first week, and the Board would plan out later where you was to stay all along." But Melody spoke more quickly than she had intended, "Why — I understood that I was to go to the Seth Owens' for the first week."

"Yes," Sarah replied, "but Mrs. Owens is down with quinsy and so the Board said us. Things ain't so good at home since Ma — went. Gramma's feeble and can't do nothing. But you're welcome." There was apology in poor Sarah's voice.

"Oh, thank you, Sarah. And you're nice to have me," said Melody. "I'll try not to be any trouble." But her heart sank.

And so after school, which Melody dismissed early since dark came soon at this time of year, Louisa drove Melody and the three Millspaughs to their farm and from there she would take Gospel Bearer and the carryall back to Concord.

They drove into the cluttered barnyard and the children jumped out. Melody alighted and took her valise from the back. "Good-bye, Louisa," she called lonesomely. Joseph and Abner tramped past her in their high boots; their long legs had outdone the old ones of Gospel Bearer. Brother Millspaugh stood upon the kitchen stoop. He was now dressed as the boys were, not in his fine, board-meeting town clothes. And none of them reached for the valise.

But Brother Millspaugh's smile was wide.

"Well! Well! Welcome, Miss Melody. And come right on into the house. We'll stir round and see what we can find to cook for supper after while. Just set your valise there behind the door; no use your climbing the stairs with it now. Miss Melody Merrill, I take the greatest pleasure in making you acquainted with the young man from Boston we had all set our heads on having that school-teaching job here at Brier's Nest. He was late getting here but here he is at last."

Melody dropped her valise in the middle of the kitchen floor and turned toward the doorway of the big room. Phillip Walton, golden hair waving back, cleft chin and all, stood there grinning at her. And when at last she compelled herself to hold out her hand he took it before all the curious onlookers. What would they think if they knew he had once held it firmly, fondly, while he carried its small owner from a rowboat to shore in mud and water up to his knees?

"I am, indeed, glad to meet with you, Miss Merrill," he said. And by the way his handclasp tightened and his eyes laughed, Melody knew that he, indeed, was.

But — was she glad to meet him again?

CHAPTER SIX

EDUCATION MARCHES ON

M ELODY'S FIRST week of teaching at Brier's Nest and boarding at the Millspaughs' was a try-patience time. Everybody seemed at cross-purposes with everybody else. Millspaugh, himself, was torn between two desires. One of them to please Melody and stand high in her opinion. The other one was to hire a man teacher and thus strengthen his position on the Board, for men teachers were more desired by everybody. He would not aggravate the young schoolmarm lest she definitely refuse to marry him, should he propose again at some future date, as he hoped to do. And he must be civil to this Phillip Walton because he would like him to have the school; then perhaps Melody would have Millspaugh, himself. It would take some planning.

Phillip remained in the Millspaugh farmhouse as a guest but had little to say about taking over the school or trying the examination for it. Of schools in general he would talk by the hour; how was this done at Four Corners and how long was the school term at Brigg's Hollow? What schooling was required of a teacher at Sudbury Mills? Just all such questions that Millspaugh was not just sure about and that made a body feel foolish,

being on the Board and all. He wished this Mr. Phillip would either take Brier's Nest school or get along on his way, wherever he was going.

Another thing, he didn't like the fine manner he had with teacher. It played his own lack of manners up to disadvantage, he uncomfortably sensed. So he pointed up his own merits with much talk of circuit riding and news of the Lord's work; the crying need of it roundabout. Maybe he wasn't just up to snuff in reading and ciphering but he was still on the School Board, wasn't he? And he could straddle a horse or a pulpit with the best of them.

Melody was fair torn between the determination that she would not be pushed aside and dispossessed of her school and her personal feeling for this handsome, laughing Phillip. Her heart positively pattered when he looked at her or spoke to her and that was quite frequently. But she would fight to the teeth to hold that old, chipped-up teacher's chair with the bright calico cushion that she, herself, had made, and the rudely nailed up desk before it.

And here she now found herself not merely between two fires — that of the school's round-bellied heater and the Millspaugh cookstove — but half a dozen. Within two days of her arrival at the farmhouse the children had begun to depend upon her. They asked her how many potatoes to peel for supper, which smock should small Sylvester wear, as they would have asked their mother. And old Gramma Millspaugh settled back into her fancied illness with an apparent content.

Brother Millspaugh would have a roaring fire going in the stove when they all got home in the evening, if he were not out on a mission, and he had been keeping pretty closely to the farm, lately. His Bible would be lying, open, upon the hearth or the

kitchen table like as not, as if he had been studiously at work with it all day and had hurriedly laid down the Word only to minister to his beloved family.

Or he would be feeding stock or doing other chores about the farm. Small chores. At dark he would come stamping into the house in his high boots, inquiring good-naturedly what was for supper. And while he waited to learn he might bury himself in the Word. Or he would take down the silver coffin plate of Matilda Harriet Millspaugh, wife of Silas Matthew Millspaugh, from the mantelpiece, throw himself back in the squeaking, wooden rocker, take out his blue bandana and polish every curlicue to a shining brilliance. Let certain young women see what he thought of a wife! No coffin plate upon any mantel in the countryside was kept shinier than Matilda's!

On Melody's first night or two at the farm she had waited in her room for the call to supper. But when at last she came downstairs and found the two young girls worrying about trying to make something extra for teacher, and washing up dried dishes that had been left since morning; not knowing that it took beans long to cook and expecting to serve them for supper within the hour, she had, out of desperation and pity for them, taken over. Yes, she had cleaned and cooked and been housemaid on every evening since her arrival.

"Mommy always done the cooking and we took care of the little ones. You know Randy and Lisbeth and Caroline, they died. They was between Milly and Sylvester. I guess we make a poor out of it," said Sarah.

"Yes, that's why Pa wants to marry another woman right off, so we can kind of get straightened round. And then he can go on his circuit riding, too," Milly added her information.

Phillip Walton was gone when they all arrived home one

evening. Millspaugh explained that he had said he was going to Boston and would be there for some time.

"Mighty wishy-washy, that fellow. Don't know whether he wants a school here or there or any place. Up from hither to yon and roundabout, now here, now there. He ain't nobody for no woman ever to tie to."

And though Melody was silent she could not help agreeing within her own heart that it was true. Such a man was nobody for a girl to tie her life — she meant her thoughts — to. Still she could put no spirit into her unspoken criticism.

"Mighty smart young man though, I will say that!" declared Millspaugh, feeling free to praise Phillip, now that he was no longer in competition. "Mighty smart teacher he would make for Brier's Nest. Now why these young women of this day and age wants to wear themselves out teaching school is more than I can make out. It's not modest nor fitting if you ask me. Place for women is in the home. Now I've got me two cows coming fresh next spring, forty acres good, arable land, ingrain carpet on that parlor floor, tony as the best of them, five nice children. What more could a woman want?"

"Let's get into these dishes, Sarah," or "I have some papers to grade in my room. Excuse me Brother Millspaugh," Melody would say and quickly race up the narrow stairs to breathe freely for a few moments.

Melody felt sure it was through some influence of Millspaugh's that the other families roundabout did not immediately welcome her to stay in their homes their share of the time.

"I had expected to go to the Andrews this week. Those were the plans, were they not?" Melody said when Millspaugh stopped the team and wagon for them all one evening, an un-

usual thing for him. "I brought my valise along this morning, expecting that."

"Well now, it's been a busy time and folks is right hard put for room and board, lots of them. Tom Andrews won't say nothing but I know for a fact they ain't fixed to keep no teacher. You hop in. Plenty at our house." And the children were so happy when she did say no more and climbed into the wagon that she felt somewhat content. They made talk all the way home. "Ain't that a pretty place? That's Tollivers'," said Sarah.

"No prettier than oun," declared her father from the driver's seat. "Make oun look twice as good — now I just had the time."

"It's someway though that ours ain't — isn't," said Abner. "A body goes over there, everybody bustling round and laughing and showing everybody else how he's planted a field or mowed out hedgerow or something. They act like it's fun and important, I guess you would say, to farm. Round our place nobody cares if nobody does nothing. When I get big I'm going to farm like the Tollivers. I'd rather farm like them than do any kind of work if I just knew how."

"You said 'er, Ab! Me too!" declared Joseph. "Nath Merrill — your brother Nath, Miss Melody, and your father too — they farm the right way. And old Mr. Stanford, and he's educated."

"Henry Thoreau is as good at raising beans as at translating languages. Don't ever get the idea, boys, that labor with the hands, if that is the kind you like, is less dignified than work with books," Melody told them.

Brother Millspaugh drew rein and unloaded them at the farmhouse in not too good a humor. He didn't know exactly

what teacher meant but it had not sounded as good for circuit riders as for farmers.

Melody felt hurt that Phillip had not said good-bye to her or even told her he was leaving, or that he would ever be back. Or whether he would have taken on the Brier's Nest school if she had stepped out. But step out she never would, of that she was certain. She loved the work and the children too. Looking back it seemed that she had always known and loved them — all her life and not for just a few weeks, and she believed they felt the same toward her. Even the big Millspaugh boys, seeing her wash dishes with their sisters, and place a platter of well-cooked food before their hearty young appetites, had quit talking about frogs in her desk or what Pa wanted. Such moments, such bits of conversation as they had held in the wagon the other night, about the worth and value of small or common things like farming, Melody held to her heart.

Dave and Tobe Moody, seeing the stand the Millspaughs had taken, had quit talking about being whipped daily with finger-sized hickories. And the big boys went early to the school for her each day now and made the fire. Yes, Melody was making her own place as well as a place for her children, and hot tears sometimes sprang up as she savored the fact.

Some of the small Brier's Nesters now had McGuffey's readers, every one of the Millspaugh clan proudly leafed one, and by a great deal of makeshift Melody managed to have them do for all. Of course the Moody boys had immediately embellished the white front pages of their own with this dire warning, in their best flourishes:

*Steal not this book, my honest friend,
For fear the gallows will be your end!*

*The gallows is high; the rope is strong,
To steal this book you know is wrong.*

Not to be outdone in property rights Abner Millspaugh had said in just as fine flourishes, in his own reader, as well as in Sylvester's, at the latter's admiring insistence:

*Steal not this book for fear of your life
For the owner carries a butcher knife!*

Jody Mullins had the new Christmas shoes even in advance of the holiday and she sat with them precariously out in the aisle at all times. Melody had taken the white curtains from the windows and had washed and starched and ironed them at home, and brought them back and hung them up again, to brighten the schoolroom. And she had taken some of the pictures from her married sisters' old rooms at home and hung them upon her schoolhouse walls. Also, she had cut a likeness of a man from a Boston paper, placed it in a frame, and hung it up behind her desk.

"That is the picture of Horace Mann," Melody told the children. "He wants, more than anything in all this world, for children to have the time and chance to learn. He wants them to have the very best teachers that can be had, all over this United States, to teach them. And — something you will like about him, Tobe Moody — he is against any boy or girl having a teacher's hand raised to him, or her, in whipping, with a finger-sized hickory or anything else!" Melody laughed at Tobe and he grinned back. And he colored and began to leaf through his McGuffey Reader. If this education were a thing not whipped into a body but something that he could take or leave alone — well, he would take it.

Melody had brought one of her mother's bright tablecloths from home, and she spread it upon her desk for them all to eat upon at noons. If the boys got time maybe they could nail up a sort of table from rough planks for them to use, she suggested. And immediately there began an important signaling between Abner and Joseph and Tobe that they knew just the planks.

The mornings were given over to study and recitations and in the afternoons, while the boys studied their books, the girls worked an hour or so at sewing. Now they were making a Memory Quilt. Bits and pieces of all shapes and colors were clipped and sewed into the pattern of a flower wreath. It was a flower wreath because all of the pieces must be from garments of the deceased. Had it been from pieces of the garments of living citizens it would have been merely a wagon wheel. All country schools must have pieced a quilt by the end of the term to show that their time had not been entirely wasted in the three or four months, with such foolishness as reading and spelling and ciphers.

Now Melody would sit and grade papers with the girls all around her and they would sew and plan. They were allowed to talk while they sewed — Melody's own innovation — therefore they might draw around the stove and be cozy, while the boys clattered to the back seats with their books. It was on such an afternoon that Melody was planning the Christmas Party to herself, keeping an eye on the back seats and attending to the girls, all at the same time.

"This here," said Harriet Buford, "this here was Gramma Cardwell's shroud. Ma, she took a little snip, her and Mis' Mullins, out of the armhole where it wouldn't show, for pieces. It's black, so maybe I better put the date of birth and death in red, don't you think so, Miss Melody?"

Melody thought that the red would be striking against the black.

"I'm glad she was buried in black," said Harriet contentedly, "because red is all the color of thread I've got. If the pieces had been yellow, how awful my square would have looked. Now I think I'll cut up this blue bombazine stuff. It will make a lot of pieces."

"You dassent! You dassent, Harriet! That's goods from Aunt Serinda Strausser's dress and she ain't dead yet."

"But she will be! She's dauncy as anything! Uncle Dave told Ma he didn't think she would last through the winter. You know how dauncy she is, Miss Melody!" But Melody advised Harriet to wait a while to cut the bombazine and go ahead with her stitching.

"This piece with the silk stripes," said Mehitabel Andrews, "that was Mrs. Major Bartlett's shroud. Ma helped to lay her out. There was a big bustle bow in the back so the women just cut it off for quilt pieces. It was such a pretty lavender stripe they all liked it. What was she going to do with a bustle bow anyhow? Her not having decent black, let alone a bustle bow, caused plenty scandal roundabout anyway. But" — Mehitabel was pensive — "it was her wish."

"Miss Melody, do you believe in rapping spirits? They say you ask them something, two raps means yes and only one rap means no. It's the spirits from folks that's died and gone. They say everybody in Boston and Philadelphia and all the big cities, they're just going round to churches and parties and everywhere, calling up the rapping spirits. They say it's kind of fashionable to have them, like having a party for live folks." Mehitabel snipped, snipped.

"For some they'll rap and for some they won't," Harriet Bu-

ford informed them. "Oh, I would just dearly love to go to one of those seances — is that the right word, Miss Melody? I would just dearly love to know if I am going to die soon or late — Oh, Miss Mell!"

Mehitabel started up with a little shriek, dropping her work to the floor. Because there had distinctly sounded two firm raps. Now as Melody quickly looked up from her grading, and the girls stared eerily about, there came two more distinct raps and they were followed by a stillness that would freeze one. But Melody refused to be frozen.

"Joseph Millspaugh, you may come forward and pick up all the little bits of quilt pieces that Mehitabel has dropped in her fright. Hand them to her with a manly bow," Melody ordered, and Joseph, red-faced and grinning, did as directed, amid the giggles of all. Melody was glad of the giggles, and glad of the joke that Joseph had, somehow, felt free to make.

The last class of the day was the geography class. At the pupils' taking up this study Millspaugh (and all the rest of the Board, so he said) had felt rather "dubiers." Now who was this Jedidiah Morse that had made this newfangled geography, he wanted to know. They never studied geography in school when he was a boy. And how was anybody to know if the rivers and such lay like the pictures said? Why, if you were up in the sky looking down, you couldn't see a river for the treetops. These female teachers! They had never taught geography in Brier's Nest school before; no man teacher had. Woman's place was in the home, if you asked him.

And some nights he would read aloud, prosy excerpts from the Boston and Philadelphia papers. That was more to show that he was able to read than to impart to them any knowledge that he found there, Melody could not help thinking.

"Here's a piece in this here *Public Ledger* that I'd like to read to you women folks," he would say, worrying the quid in his cheek and looking about for the necessary receptacle till Milly or Sarah dutifully brought it alongside his chair.

"It says here: *Our ladies soar to rule the hearts of their worshipers and secure obedience by the scepter of affect. Is not everything managed by female influence? A woman is a nobody; A wife is everything. A mother is next to God, all-powerful. The ladies of Philadelphia, therefore, under the influence of the most serious, sober second thoughts, are resolved to maintain their rights as wives, belles, virgins*" — Brother Millspaugh's voice dropped modestly upon that word — "and mothers and not as women."

"Same thing," Millspaugh would declare, "reading here again, in the *New York Sunday Age*, I believe it was, that editor Grattan, or some such name, said that if the women gave evidence of their puddings and pies how much happier they might be."

"How much happier they might be? How much happier the men might be!" With this unaccustomed sally Sarah giggled, and for that she received one of the sternest looks of her life.

And still with all this discouraging and adverse news Melody taught school and, to all appearances, expected to go on teaching the rest of her days. She was thinking of these things as she now put aside her papers and heard the boys recite geography while the girls continued to sew. Her own thoughts were running about, hither and yon, like the tributaries of the Mississippi, and she was caught in a medley of uncertainties and hopes.

"Children, put aside your books. I have something to tell you," she said, at last, when the hands of her father's turnip

watch upon the wall, just under the picture of Horace Mann, pointed to mid-afternoon.

"On the last Friday before Christmas we will have a party. You shall all invite your family and your friends. And we will put on a play and entertain them and we shall all have fun. Every one of you will have some part, and since there is not much time left in which to practice, I hope you will do your very best. Your mothers may bring a basket dinner if they like. The party will last through the whole afternoon and evening. And there is still more to the surprise — my brother Nath will bring a spinet out in his sleigh and we shall have real music with our singing, and surprise everybody."

"A spinet is all right," said Abner Millspaugh when Melody acknowledged his upraised hand, "but Pa wouldn't 'low no fiddles, him on the Board and preaching roundabout and all."

"I know that is true, Abner, and of course we would not think of having fiddles but — What have you to say, Harriet Buford?"

"Oh, Miss Melody! A spinet! My Aunt Maryann Hastens has a spinet. When I was at Boston to see her I played it. And Ma, she practiced sixty-five times till she could play *Mary to the Saviour's Tomb* as fast as a quadrille. Oh, I just wish I could have another crack at the spinet, Miss Melody! We ain't got none."

Melody assured Harriet that she should certainly have another crack at the spinet, come the Christmas Party.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHRISTMAS AT BRIER'S NEST

AT THE Alcotts', Melody had found a book telling just how the people in foreign countries observed Christmas. Now she planned that each of her pupils should represent one of these countries and play a little act or speak a piece and surprise everybody.

And it would surprise everybody, she knew. Because the prevalent opinion among grownups was that children should be seen and not heard. And at "gatherings" the children made do as best they could through long and prosy discourses, on one subject after another, by the dull elders.

The Brier's Nesters now hugged themselves and each other at the idea. No teacher had ever before wished them to do anything except study and recite and listen and take the finger-thick hickory. No man teacher had ever thought they might do something worth while themselves. And now that Miss Melody would have them do things before an audience, as she said, their cups fairly ran over. Why, they would be almost like actors!

At first Melody had thought of bringing them down to Concord and letting them see a play that the Alcotts might put on

in their big barn. But the weather was unpredictable and many of the mothers with babies might be unable to go. So it was planned to let all, who would, come from Concord and to let the children be the hosts. Now on the 23rd of December, just after noon, the round-bellied stove sent out its welcome to sleighfull after sleighfull of parents and friends as they gathered at the schoolhouse.

The big boys had cut green pine branches from the adjoining wood and these, spread fanwise in the windows, shut out the starkness of the snow. Horace Mann, upon the wall, wore cedar plumage behind his long, kind head. The spinet had greenery upon it, too, but not enough to hide it. The children were proud of, and awed by, the spinet. Every member of Brier's Nest school wore a sprig of greenery upon his dress or coat, and Sylvester Millspaugh importantly passed a basket of the sprigs to visitors, with pins. The room was a hubbub of gaiety and glad visiting as soon after noon as the folks could decently get there without seeming too eager.

But the folks from Concord were just as early as the Brier's Nesters. Henry Thoreau carried for his mother a basket large enough to require both of his hands. And Mrs. Farragut came soon after, ushering in the eight girls from her Charm School, each with ruffles fluttering, bonnets abob, and each with a well-filled basket upon her arm. For Mrs. Farragut had carefully seen that each basket be proudly bulging and that it be genteely covered with a crisp tablecloth. Good manners began in the kitchen, she had told them all, and, knowing her ability to cook as well as bow, they agreed with her. The Alcotts were seven and they had among them only two baskets, to be sure, but they brought, if not an abundance of food, enough good cheer and laughter to make any party a success.

Melody knew many of the parents now. She had left the Millspaughs the second week in December and she sometimes wished that she had not. Both Abner and Joseph were now kept at home on the least pretext, it seemed. The girls and little Sylvester were still hoping she would come back. The Mullins' home was much poorer than the Millspaugh's but Melody was more content there. Lying in the bed she shared with Jody she sometimes worried about the Millspaugh children.

Now the mothers were shy and the fathers, big and weather stained and awkward, were not used to schoolmarms. They stood about filling the small schoolhouse to capacity. But the children were glad and proud that Ma and Pa had come.

The women, of course, looked at Mrs. Farragut's genteel young ladies and their fine feathers with unabashed curiosity. Why even she, herself, had worn fine flowered bonnets and swishy silk skirts when she was that age, Mrs. Samantha Mullins, mother of Jody and three smaller, whispered to Mrs. Ebenezer Moody. Melody flitted about with a welcome that reassured and warmed them all. Now they could see what the children meant when they insisted upon going to school every day, "weather or not."

When everyone had found some kind of seat and Melody would have mounted the small rostrum the big boys had built, to begin the program, she was delayed. For now entered Selectman Millspaugh. And immediately behind him came Mr. Phillip Walton in green-checked coat and cream-brocaded stock, if you please, as if he really were going to a party. Maybe not to a party though, Melody swiftly thought; maybe to a teacher ousting! Now what did he do in these parts?

And she supposed that, with his fine Boston upbringing, he would have to laugh at the efforts of her poor babies who so

longed to shine by being in plays. And they should shine! Did this fine Phillip Walton or Schoolboard Selectman Millspaugh look down their noses at her entertainment, she would set them outside on their ears.

Melody's first embarrassment had passed and now as she thought sketchily, between putting a child right there, and informing another of something else, of her unexpected guests, she grew rosy with anger as well as excitement. Millspaugh came for no good, that she knew. And Phillip came with him — why? But — some way her foolish heart just sang above all the hubbub, because he had come, no matter why.

"Now we shall start our Christmas entertainment by singing, if Mrs. Farragut will be so kind as to help us at the spinet," said Melody. Round went the proud Brier's Nesters' heads. If the spinet were not their own it was at least in their schoolhouse and they would sing with it. Mrs. Farragut came down smiling and preening and took her place. She drew off first one fine silk glove and then the other, as she always did, and flung them to the top of the spinet in stylish disdain. She flexed her slim, white fingers that had, only that very morning, molded the six loaves of light bread now reposing in the big basket by Melody's desk.

"All of the children have worked hard to learn their parts," said Melody, passing looks with her row of twelve there about the fine spinet. "Their mothers have worked hard, too, to make proper costumes for them. That was hard to do since none of us have ever seen the foreign people we shall represent, or what they do wear.

"Now we are going to try to show by some little acts, what Christmas means to boys and girls in other countries. We shall begin by singing a patriotic song. And we hope that everyone

who knows the words will sing with us. But first, Joseph Millspaugh will come forward and tell us about the song." She stepped aside and motioned Joseph up the two steps and onto the platform.

Joseph, shy and big in his man-sized boots, came forward awkwardly, but proudly too, all could see.

"It's the song *America*," he said. "Teacher — I mean Miss Melody, said it was beautiful. She said we ought to sing it lots because it was about just the hills and woods and things round-about that we all know. Samuel Smith wrote it. He was a preacher. Only about twenty-four years old, he was. Boston feller — fellow, too. It ain't — isn't a very old song. First time it was ever sung, I guess, was about 1832. It was at a Fourth-of-July celebration in Boston. Well — I guess that's my part of the program."

I love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills, my heart with rapture thrills like that above. Mrs. Farragut let her fingers pick up the notes and toss them out upon the air like so many little, fragrant nosegays, and all of the children sang lustily, and the parents joined in as best they could.

Melody sat down upon her own calico-covered chair at the edge of the platform with the folds of her best lavender taffeta billowing about her. The glossy curls that she had bought in Philadelphia were pinned back for a change and swept her white neck. All the rosy anger gone, and simply the pink of her own thoughts, now growing happier by the minute, lending her cheeks color, she was as lovely as a rose, she frankly knew. She knew it because the eyes of Mr. Phillip Walton, sitting there beside the grim Millspaugh, told her so. And her heart with rapture thrilled. Perhaps because of rocks and rills but perhaps, and more likely, because of a fine, green-checked waist-

coat and a cream-brocaded stock. She had not time to "cipher" out her own emotions now.

Truessy Hamilton was going to recite *The Night Before Christmas*. Truessy was sweet in a brand-new linsey-woolsey frock of brown, and her tight braids were tied with a bit of black riband, scarce as riband was. Mrs. Hamilton looked around the baby's bobbing head at her daughter who was "in it" and was proud.

"This poem is by Doctor Clement Moore, Professor of Divinity in the New York Theological Seminary"—Truessy breathed more freely now that the big mouthful of title was disposed of—"and we learned it out of his book of poems that they published just a year or so ago, in 1844. He wrote it about twenty years ago though, for his children. But he didn't think it amounted to anything. And he was even mad when somebody first published it. Teacher—Miss Melody said we should know about these Christmas things because we don't do enough about Christmas. The grownups don't, she says. I mean—she means we don't celebrate it enough—only just give the children presents, and she thinks it would be nice if everybody gave each other presents.

*"Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house
Not a creature was stirring; not even a mouse—"*

Truessy spoke the piece to the end, never forgetting a word, to the admiration of everyone and of Melody most of all.

"We now have little Christmas scenes and Miss Louisa Alcott will explain them as the children present them," Melody announced and stepped down from her stage, glad to be out of the focus of those so strangely different glances that were being

shot at her by two gentlemen sitting side by side, Millspaugh and Walton.

Louisa was tall and her shyness kept her from mounting the stage. She stood down near the steps.

The best parlor curtains which Melody had brought from home parted and out came Mehitabel Andrews and Sarah and Milly Millspaugh. Mehitabel bore a large glass dish. "Honey," she explained as she held it up between her audience and the big Argand lamp which Nath had brought over. On the tray which Sarah carried were gold and silver coins and she let them spill slowly through her fingers. And Milly carried a lighted lamp.

"The Brier's Nest school presents Christmas observances of the early Romans," explained Louisa, and just the way she linked up Brier's Nest school with such historical folks made every one of its scholars feel important. Up to then they had just "gone there" to school; now they felt part of an organization.

"It was the common practice in early Roman days to give such sweets as honey so that the coming year for the recipient might be sweeter," said Mehitabel, and in her effort to show again that her dish contained honey she all but spilled it upon the cherished new dress.

"They gave silver and gold that wealth might attend them," said Sarah Millspaugh, tinkling the coins upon her tray.

"And lamps were given as a symbol that the recipient's days might be full of light." Milly held high her lamp, the globe of which she, herself, had painstakingly polished.

Then back behind the curtain the three walked, self-consciously and awkwardly, but importantly. Melody's heart swelled within her with love for them and for all of her Brier's

Nesters. It was the first time in any of their lives that they had been listened to and looked at with respect. It was the first time they had counted more than anyone else in a crowd.

"And now," said Louisa, "we have with us Queen Elizabeth. History tells us that she relied upon Christmas gifts from her subjects to replenish her wardrobe. It tells us, too, that these gifts were not tendered any too willingly by her subjects. Well — we shall see."

Harriet Buford came strutting out with a tablecloth about her middle. She wore Melody's short, blue-plush pelisse over her shoulders and a gold-paper crown upon her head.

"The queen!" Louisa announced with the dramatic tone that had now come to delight her audience. She sounded exactly like a showman, the whispers said.

"I'm a queen but where are my robes? I'm fair naked!" Harriet cried. "A queen, with no green ginger in the house! My maid in waiting has cut the last bolt of cambric! It's a good thing that Christmas is coming!" Harriet swaggered about in queenly style and fumed, while the tablecloth dragged in the back.

"I am the Archbishop of Canterbury," declared Abner Millspaugh as he strode out from the curtain in his cowhide boots (but well-oiled) and his hickory shirt. And he presented the irate queen with two hundred dollars, as he loudly named the sum.

"And I am the Archbishop of York — two hundred and fifty dollars!" The Archbishop of York made his present to the queen and stood grinning fifty dollars' worth at the Archbishop of Canterbury. And everybody in the audience laughed. They thought it fun. All of them except Brother Millspaugh. "I have brought for your Majesty this fine silk petticoat,"

declared Drusy Owens as she creaked out in her new shoes and presented Melody's own violet-silk petticoat to the queen. Melody cast round her eyes in embarrassment only to encounter the laughing ones of that Phillip Walton. He might even have seen a bit of it as he carried her to shore that time, careful as she had tried to be.

"Silk stockings for my queen!" Georgie Hancock strode forth with them, and Millspaugh looked sterner than ever. But nobody at all paid any attention to him because the queen was shouting out in her best Hi-spy voice, "Silk stockings! I've never had a pair of anything but wool or cotton on my legs but from hence I'll wear no others! I vow it's a queen's right!"

"I am the queen's doctor. I bring her a box of green ginger. A cup of its tea will save me a call," from Silas Hancock. And Jody Mullins, in the role of the royal dustman, with red braids sticking out from under Joseph Millspaugh's cap, presented two bolts of cambric. Oh, it was fun, said the royal dustman's grin as she tossed the red braids.

In the next act out came a small girl, Jody again, bearing a basket of evergreens.

"I am a little German girl," she said. "My people are expecting the Goddess of Domesticity and the Home. She comes every Christmas. Families will deck their homes in these boughs and light fires of boughs. And the goddess will appear and guide all who will in telling fortunes of family and guests. It was from this custom that Americans say Santa Claus comes down the chimney instead of in at the door. We Germans, though, say that it is the Spirit of Hertha."

"Our presents are something pleasant"—Jody took a stick of candy from her basket and laid it upon Melody's desk, "and something useful"—she laid a pencil beside the candy, "and

something for discipline" — and beside the other things she placed a birch switch. It was the first switch of any kind that had ever rested upon that desk since Melody had taken it over.

Now an elf wearing a gray suit and a red cap appeared upon the stage. "I am the elf, Jule Nissen, of Denmark, and I live in the attic. If you will take a bowl of milk and rice from your Christmas Eve dinner and put it in the attic, as the folks of Denmark do, the next morning you will see that I have eaten it. They call me the Little Person and I play tricks on quarrelsome families. To good and peaceable folks I bring good things. I keep the cattle quiet and care for them when the stableman forgets."

"I am Saint Basil from Greece and it is I who leave gifts there on Christmas." Sarah Millspaugh wore a band of pine boughs, all bound round with one of Melody's silk sashes, upon her brow.

"In Greece, Christmas loaves are baked. They have a cross on top and a coin inside. The father and mother break a loaf in small pieces and divide it among the family. Each dips his bit in wine and eats it. The one that finds the coin must buy a candle for the church with it. And he will be lucky all through the year."

Now came Drusy Owens and Sylvester Millspaugh under a brown shawl, claiming to be a camel.

"I am the camel of Jesus, from Syria," declared the end of the camel that wore the wonderfully creaky new shoes, "and I, being the youngest camel that was with the Wise Men that night, present the gifts in Syria." The camel loped off the stage squealing and giggling.

Then came Switzerland which received its gifts from Saint Lucy and Father Christmas. Czechoslovakia declared that an

angel, accompanied by Saint Nicholas, brought them. Holland and Belgium, hand in hand, laughed at American children because they must wait until December twenty-fifth for their presents, while they, themselves, received theirs on December sixth. Poland claimed their gifts came from the stars and Hungary believed the angels brought them.* One way, Louisa Alcott pointed out, was as sweet as the other. And as true, she declared shyly. And everybody nodded in agreement and reverence.

"Now Drusy and Jody are going to pass around some little picture cards that we made in school — after lessons were over," Melody hastened to add the explanation as she took charge, for her eyes accidentally swept the vast expanse of Millspaugh. "We call them Christmas cards. We read in a New York paper that a Mr. W. C. Dobson — he's one of the Queen of England's favorite painters — well, it seems that he has made some pictures on cards for his friends for Christmas, and even has sent some of them here to America. I think he lithographed them. It seemed such a nice idea that we, here at Brier's Nest school, made some for our friends — for you all.†

"Of course we had to use just lead pencils and a little coloring — Sarah and Mehitabel and I had some roses from our last-summer's hats that we boiled to make the red." Melody laughed shyly and too late remembered that it was not only Brier's Nesters who listened. No, there sat that fine, gallivanting, from-hither-to-yon schoolteacher, that Mr. Phillip Walton. She could have bitten her tongue off.

"But anyway I am sure you all know what we mean, don't

* 1901 *Christmas Fads & Fancies* — Alfred Carl Hottes

† John Horsley designed a card for Sir Henry Cole but not until 1846 and they were not sold until 1858 or 1859 — T. G. Crippen in *Christmas & Christmas Lore*.

you? What do these cards mean, Jody, when we give them to people?" Melody looked proudly out over this Phillip's wavy blond head and fought for time and poise.

"They mean that we love folks and wish them well. Isn't that what you said, Miss Melody?" Jody strutted about with her cards, her small, bright braids bobbing importantly.

"Yes. And I was reading more about the idea. The paper thought it was wonderful and I am sure we all do too. Because so many of us are apart at Christmas and can't be near each other, though we would like to be. Then others of us are slow with words and can't say them. But anybody can send a card with loving words and happy pictures. I wish just everybody in the world would take up the idea. I think it would be wonderful to get cards at Christmas from all your friends, no matter where they happen to be, saying that they still remember you and love you."

Melody was a little embarrassed by her own long speech, for there sat that complacent Phillip Walton. But now he was not laughing. No, he was looking steadily and seriously at her as if she had been saying something very worth while.

"Shall we sing *Silent Night*? And won't all of you sing? If you don't know the words, just hum. We sing it here at school a great deal. And it is so beautiful! The other day, when we were talking about how it happened to be written, Sarah Millspaugh said she wished everybody could know. So won't you tell us, Sarah?"

Sarah stood up and smoothed her dress that Melody had helped her lengthen only two or three weeks before. One of Melody's rose ribbons was upon her dark, straight hair. She looked at Melody and was not afraid to speak.

"Well, it was written by a man in Austria, a long time ago,

about 1818. But nobody published it till about five or six years ago. The words were by a man — Father Joseph Mohr. He was worried because it was nearly Christmas and his organ was broken. He was sorry and he told a friend of his, a schoolmaster and an organist — Franz Gruber, I think his name was — Sarah looked at Melody and received her nod — “Father Mohr was sad because he had hoped for some extra music for midnight Mass on Christmas.

“Well, just before Christmas he went to see a woman who was sick. She died, and when he came back toward home and his church, he stopped on a hill that looked right over the town. The mountains were back of him and it was so still and all.

“He said to himself, ‘It must have been something like this, that silent, holy night in Bethlehem when the Lord was born.’ So he went on home and wrote the song even though it was late in the night. And then the schoolmaster and his wife, too, said it was wonderful. She said, ‘We will all die some day but this song never will.’ Well, anyway, they couldn’t fix the organ and so, to celebrate Christmas Eve, Father Mohr sang the song, with his friend playing the music he had composed, on his guitar. And now everybody loves it and Miss Melody says she thinks they always will and it will never die or folks get tired of it.”

*“Silent Night! Holy Night!
All is calm; all is bright,
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child;
Holy Infant so tender and mild —”*

Melody started it a little uncertainly but the children bore her up with their hearty voices. The parents, having heard it around home from the children, were able to join in. And the

love and light of Christmas was in the heart and eyes of Melody and Sarah and Henry Thoreau and Mrs. Farragut and Jody Mullins and Maryann Bemish and the entire Charm School, Phillip Walton and of all the others.

Of all the others — except Brother Millspaugh.

But Melody minded not at all now because her father and Nath were bringing in a big covered basket that even she, herself, had not known about. And when they opened it there were toys and warm mittens and bits of riband that would make fine bows for the girls' hair. And there were china dolls and homemade candy and popcorn for everybody.

Mrs. Farragut's Charm School had dressed dolls for the past week and let the gentle bows and the fine quirks of a little finger around a teacup go. And the Alcott girls, too, had sewed. As well as a small china doll for every girl, there were knitted suspenders and neckties for the boys.

And Henry Thoreau had brought a big box of fine new lead pencils from his father's factory for the general use of the scholars. Come spring, he wanted all of Brier's Nest scholars and their teacher to make a trip out to Walden and picnic for the day with him, he said. That was an unusual thing for Henry to do, Melody knew. If folks came to Walden they were welcome, but they had to come, for the most part, without invitation. And her heart glowed within her. She had shown Brier's Nesters to her family and friends. They, too, could see how wonderfully worth while these humble people were.

And now as the crowd milled about and the men began talking weather and crops and city news that they read in the papers and the women began spreading the feast, she felt a touch upon her arm. Phillip turned her about, facing one of the windows,

and pushed aside a fan of cedar boughs. The moon above them shone like silver upon the frosted glass. The crowd was so great that nobody could have noticed his arm about her waist, even though green checks against lavender were pronounced.

But he said nothing. He just stared up at the lovely moon, and he hummed softly, against the burning pink ear below the Philadelphia curl-cluster:

"Oh, little town of Bethlehem —"

And such a surge of sweetness filled Melody's heart for him — and for this night — and for the poor, small Brier's Nesters; the hard-bitten fathers and mothers, eager for Christmas joy, too — and for all things lovely, that tears stung her lids so she would have turned away.

"Miss Melody! Oh, Miss Melody!" Harriet Buford was at her elbow. "Can me and Ma have a crack at the spinet now?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

FUN AT THE ALCOTTS'

UPON MELODY'S arrival at the Alcotts' with her brother Nath, in the sleigh that cold, January morning, a door-slapping contest immediately got under way in the big, two-storied house on Prospect Hill, for there were no less than eight outside doors to the house. Did somebody knock at one of them or did somebody shout, "I've brought them groceries, Mis' Alcott," Louisa May would fling down her dishcloth and run to the front. And Anna Bronson must drop her broom and rush to the back. Elizabeth Sewell, the little sister who was never quite well, would put aside her knitting and open a side door. Or Abby May, youngest, would catapult down the stairs and fling wide another. While their mother might ask from her bed-making, upstairs, if somebody would not please go to the door! And so it went; one did not like to miss a caller.

And none of them missed Miss Melody Merrill, who had come to spend three days of her Christmas vacation with them, one may be sure, and she found herself in one of the jolliest hubbubs that one would wish to be in before she had time to get fairly into the house and lay off her pelisse and bonnet.

Now Louisa took her upstairs to lay them aside. This Lou,

who had only turned thirteen on the twenty-ninth of November — seemed as old as Melody or older. For she was taller, and a grave young person when the laughter did not get hold of her.

This was Melody's first visit to the Alcotts', what with traveling hither and yon and teaching school and all the busyness of her life, since their return to Concord. Anna Bronson came hugging up Melody's catchall and she immediately exclaimed that Lou had forgotten to put on the good pillow shams.

"We like to put our best shams forward" — Anna laughed — "and still I'm afraid you will think we are pretty plain, Melody. To tell you the truth this house doesn't do a lot of sewing and knitting, even if we are all girls."

"No," said Louisa, "we like to read and write and putter around too well. I hear old Granny Hobberstock said we would look better with knitting needles than with pencils in our hands, but we took after our father. And she said the whole world, in fact everybody in Concord, knew how plumb triflin' he was! The Alcott girls both laughed indulgently at Granny's opinion, and as if triflin' f: thers were little boys.

And now Melody noticed that the house was bare, though with a pleasant, cleanly bareness. And everywhere one looked there were books. As they ushered Melody downstairs and into the big warm kitchen where Mrs. Alcott was just removing four large, fragrant loaves from the oven, one of the first things she saw, even there, was a book lying face downward upon the table. Louisa snatched it up so her mother could lay down the bread.

"It's *David Copperfield*," she explained. "Lizzie — Elizabeth was readin', aloud while we worked. Don't you love it, Melody? I shall write some day, Mel, I know I shall!"

"Some day, my Lou. But now — just set the table, child. It will do this part of the country a great deal more good and will be

very worth while, indeed, from my point of view." Her mother laughed. And then in came Bronson Alcott. Melody had seen him often but had never talked with him. He seemed very young to be the father of such a large family and he was quite gay. In fact, it was a nice and happy family, Melody decided.

"I'm just dying to show you our studios, Melody," said Anna. She was now putting the chairs up to the big, well-scoured table which was being laden with good food. It was Mrs. Alcott who wielded the big carving knife, and sent thick slices of roast beef upon the plates all down the table. She omitted only her husband's plate and Melody remembered she had heard it said he was a vegetarian.

"Studios!" exclaimed Melody. "What fun to have a studio. I wish I had some place special but in a house with so many girls — but you have the same kind of girl-family, don't you?" She stopped and her face flushed, for she remembered that of all the girls in her own family, only she remained unmarried and in the big farmhouse where there was lots of room for anything. Of course only Anna Bronson of all the Alcotts was old enough to worry about being on the shelf, and she looked far too happy and sensible to do it.

Yes, in the west ell both Louisa and Anna had their own private studios, and they hurried through dinner so they might show them. The utmost privacy was maintained within these sacred precincts and nobody entered either room without a special invitation.

Melody liked Louisa's studio better than Anna's because it looked more like the studios one read about. For on Anna's table was a bit of sewing. Nobody sewed in studios. Nobody but Anna. However, only books were on Louisa's table. And pencils, of course, by the dozen. These Henry Thoreau

gave them from his father's factory, Louisa explained. Yes, she would keep the room a studio. Ranged on her wall-shelf were books by Dickens, her beloved Edgeworth, and many of her childhood books as well.

"I wish you would cart some of these baby books over to your scholars at Brier's Nest, Melody. Not many of them have books, that is, storybooks, have they?" offered Louisa.

"Oh, no, Lou! They would love them. But are you sure you want to give them up?"

"No! I'm sure I don't want to give them up! But I'm just as sure that I want the Brier's Nesters to have them," said Louisa, with her humorous, dry twist of words, and she laid the books aside for Melody.

The three days spent on Prospect Hill Melody would always remember as among her very happiest. In the mornings there would be household duties and she, of course, helped with them as any well-bred girl would have done when she visited.

In the afternoon they would climb the hill which lay immediately back of the house and really made a backdrop for it, like the scenery in a play. Here they would dig the red foxberry or eyebright out of the snow, which had changed into this bit of scarlet brilliance from the modest, white bloom it had been in the summer. And the girls would carry the foliage down to the house and put it into tall, stone milk jars, for winter bouquets. Or they would drag their sleds over to Hardy's Hill, a mile away, and slide down like arrows shot out of the sky.

On one of their outdoor trips Louisa led Melody up a hillside and pointed to a stump. "Look, Mel!" She stooped and cleared away innocent-looking brush and chips that concealed a hole. From the hole she lifted out a small, wooden box. "Now, don't

you ever in all your life long tell anybody else. It's our post office."

"Why, Lou Alcott! What fun you girls do think up!"

"Feather-brained, some would call us," and Louisa carefully concealed the box again.

"But whom do you write to, Louisa?" Melody asked.

"I write to myself," Louisa told her, "and sometimes to Mother and the girls. Sometimes I can write things when I can't say them."

At dark the hearty supper—with meat which his family blithely ignored Mr. Alcott's ignoring—and after that they would gather about the big open fire. And here too, as almost everywhere Melody had heard, Bronson Alcott held sway. He liked to talk, she could see. But she was not surprised that everyone, even his own family, liked to hear what he had to say. Much of it she did not understand but she thought his daughters did. That was perhaps because they had had his philosophies all their days as a steady diet. And he was earnest. He was sincere. He was almost naive.

As they talked Mrs. Alcott and the girls sewed or knitted. Almost everyone had a book within easy reach while the conversation was interspersed with a bit from one or the other about his story that was underway. When one of the family finished with a book it would be read by another, Louisa explained.

"Why, our family is just like a lending library," she declared. "We each take a turn, and I think it's fun to see Lizzie, there, puzzling her brows and wondering how the tale will end when Anna and I already know."

"Yes," retorted little Liz, "when they are just too, too enthusiastic about it I know they're teasing me and trying to get

me to read some old prosy stuff!" They all laughed at Lizzie; she was their darling.

"Sometimes we all read one book at a time," Anna explained. "That is, one of us reads aloud while the others sew or knit."

On Melody's last night at the Alcotts' she and Louisa slipped off to Louisa's studio to have a talk fest. "I want to tell you this—" and "Don't forget to remind me—I must tell you that—" had flown about between them in the three days but so much seemed happening in the jolly big family that they had not found a moment to themselves until now.

As they settled, Melody in the green-gingham draped easy chair and Louisa more importantly erect at her desk-table frittering with papers before her, Louisa said, "Tell me, Melody, what you intend to be. I mean, of course—you're a teacher. But do you always want to teach?"

"I don't know, Lou," said Melody, uncertainly, as she brushed at the cluster-curls upon her knee. "I've been thinking of that myself, thinking of it a great deal. And the other day, when I sat there in the schoolroom and watched the children out of the windows, as they played at recess, I had such peculiar thoughts. They really worried me and made me feel, well, I guess you would say, a little sad."

"You see I said to myself, 'Now I can teach these children to read and write and cipher. But—that isn't the most important thing for them to learn.' I know Brother Millspaugh thinks it is, but I don't. I think the most important thing for people to learn is how to be happy—if you see what I mean, Louisa. And to make the most of what they have, be it much or little. Well, they do that while they are children anyway, thank goodness!" Melody tucked her feet up under her in the gingham chair and

Louisa waited for her to go on, biting at one of the Thoreau lead pencils as she listened.

"But now after they leave me — leave school — the boys will just keep working on their fathers' farms or hire out to somebody else and become hard-working farmers themselves. And that's all right if they want to be farmers. But I want them to be thinking farmers — thinking men — and it seems there are so few of that kind. My brother Nath is that kind of farmer, I know, and so is Mr. Stanford, but it seems that so many are not. Now Abner and Joe Millspaugh — I think about those two boys a great deal. And I worry about them. They would make fine thinking farmers and have happy, useful lives, if they had just one single chance. But with that no-count father!

"And the girls — my girls. I don't want them to stop looking for fun and happiness and beauty after they get married. It's more important than than ever. For both themselves and their families. And that is what I want to teach them while they're little and I have them. I hope I can come back to Brier's Nest next year and maybe forever — as long as they need me. Because I want to give them something they can keep all through the years.

"Oh, Louisa, I know I don't make myself clear at all. I am not like you with words and I say things so badly. But it isn't only Brier's Nesters — I have some kind of serious longing way down inside of me to make things worth while and lasting for all children — mine now and those of other teachers like me in the years ahead. I don't know, Louisa, I suppose your father would say I have a dream too big for me to handle, one, perhaps, that I can't even see around. And it is a dream that has changed under my very hands. When I first got the school at Brier's Nest I wanted it because I wanted to be a teacher. Now

I want it because I so long to teach the children — I want, so badly, to help them."

One of those sweet silences that must hold one after timidly bringing forth a dream, now held the girls. Then Louisa said, "I know exactly what you mean, Mel. And you can do it, too. You just practice on Brier's Nesters and the way will open up for you to practice it in some bigger and better way later on. And you will be prepared for the chance when it does come."

"Lou, you are three years younger than I but I always feel that you are so wise. You help me so much and I love you for it!"

Louisa flushed bashfully but her eyes shone with happiness. She hurried on with other talk. "Tell me, Mel, do you want to — well — marry and have a home and husband and children, or will you just teach? Will teaching be enough?"

"I don't know, Louisa. I haven't had time to think a great deal about it. One could do both. There ought to be time in a woman's life for more than just one thing, with all the beautiful and worth-while things in the world to do. We ought to get wisdom enough to have a chance at more of them."

"Melody, have you ever talked to Mrs. Farragut about such things as we are talking about now? And about schools and education? Well, I know she is vain and proud-fleshed and teaches a Charm School and all. But I rode home with her in the carry-all the other day and she was saying just such things as you have said about teaching. The way she happened to bring it up: she said that Concord was wanting her, although she is already a heavy tax-payer, to throw in more for the schools. And she said she told them right out, she didn't think it would be money well-spent — unless some of the school board were taken off. If the money were used for schools instead of school boards, she told Millspaugh, she would throw in her share and

more so quick it would make his head swim, and be glad of the chance. She told him that right to his face, Melody.

"And she told him further that she would gladly pay more money if there were better boards! And when a school got a good, smart teacher, she said she told him, the teacher should have more say-so about teaching because that was what he was hired for. Most teachers, she said, are paid to whack and not to teach."

"Well, I don't whack and I never shall," Melody declared. "And Millspaugh knows it."

"Melody, who is that Phillip Walton who runs hither and yon, from one school to another? Trying them all out, round-about? Can't he make up his mind does he want to teach or not? They say he teaches a week here and a few days there and seems just as interested as he can be. Then, suddenly, off he goes somewhere else and never a word of explanation. Some think he's up to something. He was out at Millspaugh's while you were there, wasn't he?"

"Oh, him!" Melody attended carefully to taking out large curls and putting in small ones. "Yes, I guess he was around there a day or two — if I know whom you mean."

"I mean the blond, wavy-haired fellow in the green-checked coat and the cream-colored stock who was at the Brier's Nest Christmas party. Green checks look nice around lavender silk," said Louisa, with sober face but humorous eye, and Melody had to lean her laughing, guilty face into the gingham chair back.

"Well, Louisa," said Melody at last, as she finished with the curl-cluster, "here I must go home in the morning. But I've had a lovely time! After this when I 'introspect' as I call it, when I go back into my memory and take out the beautiful things that have happened to me, and look at them, and savor them again,

I shall take out these three days with you, often. But you haven't had time to read me any of your stories and poems. Will you read them now?"

"Well, all right. Just to see if you think they are at all good," said Louisa shyly, but not being able to hide the fact that she would like to read them. She rummaged in a pasteboard box and brought forth several pages of well-worn manuscript.

"But wait, Melody — here is my journal, my diary. Shall I read some of it?"

Louisa turned through the pages and read of trips to Fair Haven and Walden Pond with her mother. And of plays that she and her sisters had "put on" in the barn. Of her delight at being back at Concord. And of her days at Melody's school.

"And over here," she said, "I have three pieces of advice that Mother gave us girls, though she is not long on advice, Mother isn't. But she always says that if we follow three rules we'll come through. They are: Do your duty — Rule yourself, and Love your neighbor. Now here is a poem, Melody; see what you think of it:

*Oh, why these tears and idle fears
For what may come tomorrow?
The birds find food from God so good
And the flowers know no sorrow.*

"Why, that's lovely, Lou!" Melody cried. And she suddenly had a keen pity for her friend who had known the uncertainty even perhaps of food. And who healed her own fears and idle tears with thoughts of the birds and the carefree flowers. "Read more, honey!"

"Well, there is so much that I want to talk about instead of read. But here is the first poem I ever wrote. That was five or

six years ago; I was only about seven or eight so don't expect anything profound. Here it is:

*Welcome, welcome, little stranger,
Fear no harm and fear no danger,
We are glad to see you here
For we know sweet spring is here.
Now the white snow melts away;
Now the flowers blossom gay;
Come, dear birds, and build your nest
For we love our robin best.*

"Oh, Melody, when I read it now it sounds really better than the one I wrote when I was older. That discourages me. It makes me think that perhaps I shall go backward instead of forward. Or that maybe I never will write anything anybody will publish or read!" Louisa's eyes were misty and Melody assured her that of course she would write for everybody to read.

As the big clock down in the hall struck the unearthly hour of twelve, and sleepy as they both were, Louisa brought still another box from her press. She opened the lid and laid the box before Melody. There, making a veritable rainbow of dainty silks and satins and lawns and mulls, in the most delicate of colors and hues, lay a dozen or more dolls' dresses. Some had little bustles and some had puffed sleeves. There were bows and minute buttons and real buttonholes. Riband roses cascaded down the front of some. It was like a fairy wardrobe.

"I made them. I used to put up a sign by the gate and all of the children would come and pay a penny or two pennies for a dress or a bonnet made like they wanted it. That was a long time ago, of course, when I was very young. I'm too old for dolls now and I have been for years but I just like to look at them. I

never did care so much to play with dolls, myself. I would rather read stories, from the time I can remember. But I liked to make their clothes."

"Louisa! What exquisite little garments! Oh, I do wish you would bring them out to Brier's Nest and show the children. They would love it. How cleverly you did them! Oh, Lou, I wish I could write poetry and make dolls' dresses and think and say and write lovely things, as you can. Instead I can only teach school. I'm so stupid I can do only one thing."

"Indeed you're not stupid, Melody! All the wise things you've been saying tonight! I won't tell you how clever you are though, because it might give you vanity. Vanity, I guess, is a bad thing. I tell you I have to fight it! Every time I look in my mirror I have to keep down vanity about my long hair and my well-shaped head. And my good nose! There is something else that everyone doesn't have. I put a note in my diary now and then against pride, just to make me remember."

Now Louisa blew out the lamp on her studio table and led the way to her bedroom. When they had prepared for bed and snuggled down in the quilts and blankets and were quiet, Melody said, softly and shyly, "Lou—were you ever in love?" She might tell her friend about the handsome Phillip carrying her from boat to shore in his arms. That would put the daringness Louisa had seen in his having his green-checked arm about her completely in the shade. Yes, she too had things to tell.

"Oh, yes! I'm in love now, Melody!" Louisa Alcott declared. "I'm terribly in love!"

"You are?" Melody could not conceal her astonishment at this frank and unexpected avowal. "With whom?"

"With Mr. Ralph Emerson. Of course, Mel, I was terribly hurt at what he said about us when we went to Fruitlands. I

heard that he said 'Well, they make a fine sight in July — we will see them in December!' You know Father and some others had an idea that we could have a sort of community living; everybody would do a share of work at Fruitlands and the group would be self-sufficient and not have to call on outsiders for anything. Well, Mr. Emerson thought that the whole band, and Father most of all, I guess, were futile and improvident. And he meant that we would come, tucking our tails behind us, back to Concord. Which we did, of course, and that was why I felt so ashamed when we did come back. Though I was glad and happy to be back. All of us were, I think, even Father. And Mr. Emerson gave him five hundred dollars to get started here again, even though he did say it.*

"You know I used to write him letters telling him how I admired him. Though of course I never sent them. Sometimes I let them lie in the stump post office a day or two and then took them out. Yes, I just love him and his wife, both. She has such a lovely name — Lydian. One night I even took some wild flowers and laid them on his doorstep. And then I sang *Mignon* under his window; I could see the curtains moving. But they did not say anything. Of course, though, *Mignon* is hard to sing — and my German is very bad — they may not have known it was me."

* Lottisa May Alcott, dreamer and worker — Belle Moses

CHAPTER NINE

A PARTY IS INTERRUPTED

THE CHILDREN at Brier's Nest school were still humming *Silent Night* and wearing their new Christmas mittens and an occasional Christmas coat or dress, talking about the party and making the glad event last as long as possible, till well into January.

Of course they were greatly interested in, and very proud of, Miss Melody's gift to them all—brand-new, beautifully pictured books, McGuffey's Reader. And they were not all alike. Some were second and some were third and fourth readers, depending upon which child was to study from it.

So Melody's first month's pay she, herself, had hardly seen at all. She had held it in her beaded reticule only long enough to drive in to Boston and pass it over the counter of Ticknor's Bookshop. And the beaded reticule was Mrs. Farragut's Christmas present to Melody because she had always admired it. Mrs. Farragut now carried something more stylish.

Now on this January day Melody was resplendent in the rose-wool frock she had bought last fall purposely to brighten up a winter day for her small, color-loving scholars. She had bound a width of satinette riband about her hair to match.

Thus adorned she did not need the curl-cluster. Jody Mullins was wearing it today, pinned splendidly above her stiff red braids. Melody looked little older than Jody, and to tell the truth, she laughed in class quite as much.

"Children, you may put your readers away because I have something nice to tell you. You, Joseph — perhaps you will put more wood in the stove. I see somebody coming over the hill and around the bend and she will be here any minute. It is a surprise. Children, Louisa Alcott is coming and she has something to show all of us. Here she is now."

Louisa, tall and smiling, pushed in past Joseph as he opened the door to her stamping. And Joe went outside to take care of her horse and buggy without being told. She held a cardboard box in her arms and upon it lay two bundles wrapped in brown paper.

She laid them upon Melody's desk and took off her overboots and mittens and mantle and bonnet, and Melody hung them upon the wooden pegs in the back of the room with the children's wraps. Everybody was laughing and hugging themselves at a surprise in store. They liked Louisa almost as much as Miss Melody. She, too, was fun.

Joe came back into the room, looked to the stove dampers, and took his seat, and they all quietly waited.

"Children, Louisa has something that we will all love to see, even the boys, though perhaps it is something the girls may like better. It is something Louisa made herself and I know will interest you boys because boys can almost always make things better than girls can. Maybe you, Joe, and Tobe, will move the big table by the stove where it is warm so that Louisa can spread her things upon it."

The boys brought down the table. It was the one they had

made so they might all eat lunch together, instead of each one alone at his desk.

Louisa, now warmed, spread her bundles upon the table and opened the box. Then she lifted out something frilly. The children fairly gasped with astonishment and delight. It was a doll with china head and feet and hands; her cheeks were very red and her hair, which was painted in waves upon her head, was very black. But what everyone loved was her clothes.

The doll wore as many petticoats as any self-respecting lady in Concord or even Brier's Nest. And over them she wore stiffly spreading skirts of watered silk which alone, without the support of the cloth legs, held her up when Louisa placed her upon Melody's desk.

"You may pass the dolls along until everyone sees them," directed Louisa. "There are eight. None of us girls would ever throw one away when we were children. I made their clothes. I liked to. At Concord when I was little I used to make dresses and have a dolls' dress store in the summerhouse. I lettered a sign for the gate and the children would buy my dresses for a cent or two cents apiece."

The children whispered and sometimes cried out with delight, and Melody allowed them that pleasure. There was one doll with a cabriolet bonnet and with slippers laced almost to the knees with ribands. Another wore a bonnet with bobbing plumes that Louisa had salvaged from an old bonnet of her mother's. And after the eight dolls had been passed around, time after time, one of them coming to rest upon a desk here or there and being held fondly by a child, their clothes were also passed. Ah, there were basques and shawls and wee flowered bonnets, minute kerchiefs, small boots and stockings and mantles. Even tiny reticules and face veils to delight the heart of any girl or

woman came from the box. And the boys were not unwilling to hand them along, even holding one a moment to examine a shoe or a glove that seemed too miraculous to be true.

"Now, children, Louisa is going to stay and eat dinner with us by the fire. She says her mother and mine sent along something very special for us. It is too late now to have spelling before afternoon and — Abner, won't you or Tobe open the window there at the back a little? It seems quite warm in here, Joe being such a good fireman. So shall we spread the dinner and have a picnic? And then before Louisa goes home she is going to tell us a story. She writes stories and poems, too. And when she is older she intends to write a whole book and be an author. Joe, will you just give me a hand here with the table again? Back a little from the fire."

"Everybody, please leave the dolls and clothes upon the desks while we eat. You can hold them and look at them again while I tell the story afterward," said Louisa, knowing that every moment a doll or a glove or a face veil might be held was precious. "But now, everyone, come and help me with the baskets in the buggy — yes, here Abner is with them. Thank you, Abner." Abner set two great wite baskets upon the floor, and Louisa whisked a long, red-checked tablecloth from one of them and she and Melody spread it.

"Oh, a real party! A tablecloth even!" cried Truessy Hamilton.

"We've got one! We spread it nearly every Sunday," bragged Mehitabel Andrews.

"Well, now you can lay the plates — your mother even sent plates, Lou. And Mother made blackberry pies; my favorite — four of them. She must have started the baking early."

Yes, there were blackberry pies and a great stone jar of baked beans. A roast of beef that fairly dripped with gravy was still

hot in its wrappings. And there were brown, fried marvels piled high in a yellow-stone crock, enough for everybody to have at least two. And, as a last surprise, Louisa triumphantly placed a cluster of some two dozen bananas in the very center of the table. Some of the Brier's Nesters had seen them, but few had eaten them.

"I've et 'em!" bragged Mehitabel Andrews. "We eat nothing but them at home!" But she dropped her eyes at Miss Melody's astonished look.

"My father was in Boston yesterday and brought them home," said Louisa. "In fact," she lowered her voice to Melody as they dragged a seat up to the table, "Mother was so put out about his spending so much on them instead of getting things we really needed that she would not touch one. Then nobody else would, of course. So I brought them along. Mother's word for father is 'improvident.' "

Melody laughed. "There is nobody in this crowd too improvident to eat them, you may be sure, Lou. Now, children, come up to the table and help yourselves."

They laughed and talked and ate about the table, and hardly a crumb was left when suddenly Louisa wondered what time it was. She must be starting back home.

"The story first, Lou! They're all expecting it. You can't go without telling us the story."

Louisa Alcott stood up at the end of the table, her dark hair rough and untidy, her pale complexion a little ruddy now, from the heat of the stove, so near. Her gray eyes beamed friendliness and understanding at them all, from the long-legged older boys to small Jody Mullins who sat there so proudly, growing red braids and black curls from the same head.

Then Louisa said, "Well, first I want you all to promise me

that, with your families, you will come to our party and the play that my sisters and I will put on at our house in the spring, maybe just before school is out, or right after. But now I will say my eight-year-old poem again about the first robin, for you smaller ones, just in case you may not like my story. And she recited, "*Welcome, welcome, little stranger —*" the poem she had read from her papers to Melody, that night in her studio.

As Louisa paused there was a muffled sound and all eyes turned to the back of the room. At the window, where their breath had melted off the frost, three faces were framed. They were the faces of the Board, Cyrus Hobberstock, Brother Millspaugh and Emil Snodgrass, like a bouquet of thistles and marsh grass and dogfennel in a frame. One other face appeared now and joined them — that of Phillip Walton.

At the astonished gasp of the entire class the faces disappeared and heavy boots were heard upon the front stoop. Millspaugh led the procession into the room and down the aisle and took Melody's seat. Hobberstock and sheepish Emil followed. Phillip Walton brought up the rear. These latter gentlemen were content with the front seats for scholars.

Melody's heart came up into her throat and she looked at her charges. They were sated with food and philosophy, Bronson Alcott's philosophy. They sat or slumped in happy abandonment of all pedagogic discipline. Jody Mullins wore a mustache of blackberry juice and Melody's curl-cluster bounced upon her head as she turned it north and south, east and west, to see what was going on. Abner Millspaugh and Tobe had just set their big butter teeth into the two last marvels in the yellow crock. Harriet Buford observed, with a disinterested eye, the skins of three bananas upon her plate. She had heard of them; now she knew.

But everyone took his own seat with electric quickness, and

Louisa, in embarrassment if not actual fear, looked about for her dolls. The one with the small silk mitts rested upon Jody Mullins' desk. Others were ranged all down the row. Georgie Hancock had turned back the skirts of the one in the blue watered silk to observe her small, innocent pantalets, and she kicked up from his desk in apparent revelry. There were skirts and sundry wee garments upon each desk and Joseph Millspaugh, now aimlessly and in embarrassed agony, took up what lay before him. It was a pair of small, lace-trimmed drawers; the drawstrings hung over his red, farm-worked hands. Meeting his father's eye he dropped the little garment like a red-hot coal.

And Melody saw the clutter of berry-pied plates, the unwashed pans and bowls, the stained tablecloth where Georgie Hancock had dropped his pie and tried to pick it up with a spoon and everyone's help. She saw, too, the amused face of this fine Mr. Phillip Walton, who was, no doubt, the last word in pedagogic wisdom; there he sat beside members of the Board with his arms crossed complacently. Yes, Melody saw all this, but in all her schoolroom, from front to back, she had no glimpse of any textbook.

She took her place back of the cluttered table with what she hoped was a proud grace, a cool disdain. But she might have fallen headfirst into the still warm beanpot before her, for all the stiffness she felt in her legs.

"Children — will you — will you please bring out your Mc-Guffey Readers?" she implored them, bleakly.

CHAPTER TEN

THE BOARD WAITS ON MELODY

NOW MELODY, observing the small, frightened faces before her, (this, she told herself angrily, was because she had showed them her own fear) knew that oral reading was not exactly the thing to bring out the best in them. She would fence for time. And so she said, "Children, since the School Board of Brier's Nest honors us with a visit, I wonder if they would not first like to hear us sing. We don't usually sing at this time of day," she hastily explained to Millspaugh, "but they enjoy it and —"

"May I ask, my dear Miss Melody, if they are here to enjoy themselves?" Millspaugh wallowed back in her own small, calico-covered chair enough to fairly break it, and he put all the vitriol that every dried saucepan and unmade bed and crock of soured cream in his house had given him since Melody's departure from it into his query.

Emil Snodgrass trimmed a fingernail and Cyrus Hobberstock pulled at a bit of loose leather upon his boot, and they waited for her reply. And so did the fine Mr. Walton. They all waited for her to shame herself and her class further, so they might throw her out and put Mr. Walton in, no doubt. How ever in all

her born days she could have allowed him to carry her across a stream, or hold his arm about her while he showed her the moon through a frosted windowpane was more than she would ever know. Why, she must have been completely addled! She would swim Niagara Falls or perish in them before she would ever so much as touch his hand again.

But his bright hair roached up in the same fine wave. She looked to see, in spite of herself. And his eyes laughed at her now exactly as they had that time in midstream.

Louisa Alcott, with her quick tongue, could have put the entire Board in its place, had she had the right. But Louisa had snatched up dolls and their wardrobe and box and papers and slipped into her bonnet and mantle and was now in the schoolyard, getting the buggy turned around toward home. It was Melody's own problem, they both knew, and she must handle it.

"I thought that we would sing *Flowers, Wildwood Flowers*," said Melody, ignoring Millspaugh's caustic question. Surely that would be all right. "We sing because the little ones get so sleepy in the afternoon. This song I mentioned — we all like it. It is the first song the scholars in the public schools in Boston ever sang all together. Some say it was the first any school anywhere sang together. They never used to sing in schools but now they do, in many of them."

"They are even teaching singing and other forms of music in the cities, and especially in Boston, now, Mr. Millspaugh. They have been for almost ten years." Well! Would you believe it? That had come from one of those front seats. Mr. Phillip Walton had spoken for her! Maybe not, though. Maybe he was just showing off his knowledge to contrast it with her own know-nothingness.

They launched out after the wildwood flowers, Joseph Mills-

paugh's heavy bass voice above all the others — until he caught his father's eye. And that put a stop to that.

Now Melody was getting hold of herself and with dignity she called the Fourth Reader Class. She would show off Millspaugh's children to him. Their display of knowledge might put him into a better humor. She called upon Abner Millspaugh and to her own horror, a moment later, she heard the great fellow reading in the deep, bass voice of a man:

"Patty, aged six, fell downstairs. She did not cry but writhed in pain. 'Where are you hurt, my love?' asked her father. 'Here Papa,' said the little girl, touching the ankle which she had decently covered with her gown." Red-faced, the boy sat down and Melody hurried on to what she hoped was safer ground. "We will probably have time for a bit of each study before the Board, so I think we should go to geography next. Harriet Buford, will you please bound the United States?"

Harriet rose importantly and sang louder and more forcefully than she had of wildwood flowers that:

*"The United States boundary to you we proclaim:
Say on the north lies Britain's domain;
The Atlantic east, the farthest bound shore;
To the south the Gulf of old Mexico.
On the west the Pacific is found;
This completes the United States bound."* *

"Now will you, Mehitabel Andrews, please bound the state of New York?"

Mehitabel lifted her little face and sang to the rusty stovepipe that:

* This method first noted in 1857. Pre-dated to 1845–46 for fictional purposes.

*"To bound New York, this empire state,
Say on the north lies Erie Lake,
Ontario and Saint Lawrence too;
Canada there we also view. . . ."*

Sarah Millspaugh next read the story of *The Boy Who Stole Apples*, from Webster's old Blue-Backed Speller. The moral was that if good words and gentle means would not reclaim the wicked they should be dealt with in more severe manner. Milly continued in this text with the story of the country maid and her milk pail.

"Readers in desks. Grammar class to the front," called Melody. This was a very formal style for her. Usually she said, "Now let us get the grammar over, young'uns, and maybe we shall have time for another song." And they nearly always did.

"What is a noun, Drusy Owens?" Melody would not look at certain grinning visitors. She was all dignified schoolmistress.

Drusy scrubbed one leg with her shoe and twisted in perfect rhythm:

*"A noun's the name of anything
As: school or garden, hoop or swing."*

"A pronoun, Georgie Hancock?" asked Melody.

*"Instead of nouns the pronouns stand:
Her face; his head; your arm; my hand."*

"Joseph Millspaugh, will you tell us what adverbs do?"

*"How things are done, the adverbs tell,
As: slowly, quickly, ill or well."*

"Prepositions, Mehitabel."

*"The preposition stands before
A noun, as in, or through, the door."*

Millspaugh was apparently anxious to say something himself, and seeing this, Melody gave him the chance at the end of the grammar recitation.

"Perhaps some member of the Board would like to say a word," she suggested. And she would just give a great deal to hear what that fine Green Waistcoat had to say. And was he now a part of the Board? Or what was he? Ah, but in her own fluttery little heart Melody well knew some of the things he was; he was strong, and laughing, and tender. Her face flushed as she made way for Brother Millspaugh.

Yes, said Brother Millspaugh, he did have something to say; he had something very important to say. Very important indeed. "Now this new style of teaching," he complained, "it may be all right but it never was done so in my day. A body had to learn in them days. Take spelling, then: we had a way that was way again better than anything I heard today. Take the word arithmetic. Can you spell that, Miss Melody?"

"A-R-I-T-H-M-E-T-I-C—" sang Melody for him, more liltingly than had any of her pupils.

"Well, now, let me see. Maybe it is. But — how do you know it is? Now in my day we had feelers out for every letter, with sentences we learned by heart. Then we would know right away that we couldn't be wrong. Take that word arithmetic, now: this is the way we spelled it. You see the sentence we went by was 'A rat in the house may eat the ice cream.' Now all a body had to do was to take the first letter of each of them words and put them together. Like A for A — R for rat — I for in — T for the — H

for house — M for may — E for eat — T for the — I for ice — C for cream. And what have you got? You've got the word arithmetic spelled out as plain as the nose on a man's face. See how simple it was? Made education a lot easier.

"Then take the word 'geography.' First letters. You know the sentence they made is 'George Eliot's old grandmother rode a pig home yesterday.' Just pick out your first letters and there it is. See? Easy as pie! And the best thing about it is that you know you can't be wrong."

Melody was well-nigh in despair. Well she knew that this humorous fantasy would hold every one of her Brier's Nesters and that not only they but she, herself, would be riding the pig with George Eliot's old grandmother for the remainder of her term — if she had a remainder!

But Millspaugh had more suggestions: "Take now, the word 'incomprehensible.' By the way, can anybody in your class spell it? Well, let me tell you there wasn't a one in my class, back in my day, that couldn't spell it. Take 'incomprehensible' now: I-N — in; in is done. C-O-M — com is done. Incom is done. P-R-E — pre is done. Compre is done. Incompre is done. H-E-N — hen is done. Prehen is done. Comprehen is done. Incomprehen is done. S-I — si; si is done. Hensi is done. Prehensi is done. Comprehensi is done. Incomprehensi is done. B-L-E — ble; ble is done. Sible is done. Hensible is done. Prehensible is done. Comprehensible is done. Incomprehensible is done!" Brother Millspaugh brought down the hammer of his fist upon Melody's desk like an auctioneer and laughed. He was complacent and pleased at his own feat.

"By the way, Miss Melody, how are their manners?"

The exalted look of merriment on Phillip Walton's face all but

undid Melody. Was he laughing at Millspaugh? Or at her and her predicament? Or at something incomprehensible? Anyway let him laugh.

"Manners, Mr. Millspaugh, change a lot. And they are, of course, different in different parts of the country. I try to teach them what I know. But since we have a city gentleman with us, from Boston, I believe, perhaps he will tell us all something of manners. Will you talk to us on manners, Mr. Walton?" Melody had not even known herself that she was going to say it but she had said it. She was so angry that she trembled as she sat down in the seat beside Jody Mullins. Her hand shook as she mechanically pinned up one of her own cluster-curls on top of Jody's red head, just to have something to do.

"Well, now, maybe that wouldn't be a bad idea," Millspaugh agreed. "How do they do in Boston, fine parties and places, Mr. Walton? Would you care to speak a little on the subject?"

Phillip arose from the child's seat and stepped upon the slightly raised platform. He smoothed that sun-kissed hair down as casually as if it were not noticed and admired by every lady in the land over ten years old, wherever he went. He looked at the children and laughed. And he looked at Melody, the laughter still there.

"Well, one of the first observances of good manners in Boston, and other places, I have noticed, is that a gentleman never sits down in a room or a vehicle while a lady is standing. Seems kind of silly, Mr. Millspaugh? Mr. Hobberstock? Mr. Snodgrass?"

"Me, I can't see no reason for such dumb foolishness," declared Millspaugh. "Say now, they wasn't enough chairs in the room; the women going to sit loafing in what there is while the men stands on first one foot and then the other? Men's more important than women; Bible says so!"

"Shore are! Take now the 25th verse of First Chapter of — Let me see now," agreed Emil vaguely, and he looked relieved when Phillip resumed the subject.

"Another thing," said Phillip, as he tucked in his stock a trifle with just the gesture that Melody remembered from the travel trip — he had done that just after standing her down on dry land. Her own head had rumpled it — "another thing I might mention on the subject of etiquette, nobody, nobody at all, neither the elite nor the riffraff, neither the Lowells nor the Cabots, eat corn from the cob."

"You mean they don't gnaw it?" interposed Emil Snodgrass, incredulously. "How in thunder — I mean, how then?"

"Mr. Snodgrass, in the 1820's there were twenty-eight conduct manuals published in this United States. In the 1840's, up to date, thirty-four more have been added. But gnaw? Naw! Never a gnaw! I am sure that you have studied all of these, gentlemen, and will agree with me."

Melody was now shaking with laughter and trying to hide her guilty face behind Jody Mullins' red braids and her own curl-cluster. Phillip, seeing this, was urged on to greater efforts but now his gravity was absolute. No smile showed from the corner of his mouth. No humor escaped from his eyes.

"As for further models of gentility, I believe we can do no better than go back to the Father of our Country, George Washington. In 1747, or about that time, anyway when he was only a mere lad of fifteen or so, George had one hundred and ten precepts for polite behavior which he, himself, had worked out, according to his own young lights. One of them, Miss Melody, children, members of the Board, was: *Cleanse not your teeth with the tablecloth, napkin, fork or knife.* Another was: *Kill no vermin, as fleas or ticks, in the sight of others.*"

"One thing I fair despise is putting a body's knife clean down one's throat!" declared Emil, trying to show that he knew what was what.

"What is your opinion on that point, Brother Millspaugh?" asked Phillip, with the utmost deference.

Millspaugh looked about at them all, contemplatively, and apparently thought hard.

"Well, now, I don't know just what to say, that is, offhand like, on such a matter. That's a debatable subject, I reckon. Considering everything — mashed potatoes and dried beans, maybe sticky iced cake, round rolly peas, such like — if I was to give my honest and unbiased opinion I would say it was all right to shovel such in with a knife. I mean, of course, provided you do it neat-like. No big mouthfuls. And no clamping your jaws down tight over the knifeblade!

"Now I guess we'd better straddle our nags and be getting toward home, gentlemen. One thing though, Miss Melody, I have to say, and I'm shore the other members of the Board will agree with me, I don't think no picnics is in order like we just sneaked in on. What do you gentlemen think about that? Am I right? And another thing, Miss Melody, I don't think bright red dresses like you wear is seemly for a staid, old woman school-teacher."

Melody was walking to the door with them and she felt her face flush hotly at this attack on her personal appearance.

"I say," and Millspaugh grew bolder and more loud-mouthed as he untied his horse and saw that after his own words he might immediately escape, "I say, Miss Melody, what will folks think you are, seeing you decked out so gay and all?"

Phillip Walton sprang into his saddle and rode smartly out of the schoolyard. He shouted something back upon the wind but

his shout was so muffled with laughter that Millspaugh could not tell if he had heard aright.

“An angel!” Millspaugh thought he heard, but he could not be sure.

But Melody was sure!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A THREAT THROUGH THE MAIL

THAT YEAR one of the heaviest blizzards that had struck the country in a long time set in about the middle of January and held the roads blocked and the fields covered with a crust of snow until well into the next month. Of course Brier's Nest school was closed for the duration because travel, especially for children, was hard, either by unbroken road or cross fields.

But Melody was unperturbed. She was, in fact, pleased. Because she could see that roundabout Brier's Nest could be so much pleasanter in the spring than in the winter. Now, she figured, she had taught only about two months, a little less than two months, to be exact, taking out Christmas week. And with this time for bad weather out too, she would still have two more months to teach. And the Board would expect it and even insist upon it.

Yes, in April now, a schoolteacher could store books in desks and take long jaunts in the woods with her classes — did certain board members happen to be off on a circuit-riding trip and the coast clear, as would no doubt happen, it being just after sugar-ing-off time and syrup making and pancake frying in season.

And things in the meantime were far from dull at home.

There was the stump post office where she and Louisa Alcott

secreted letters for each other. She might make a trip there with a note for Louisa and find one from Louisa for herself, when things were too busy in their homes for an afternoon together. And sometimes when Nath passed with the big sled, she and Caroline or Emmeline and Mother would hop on and go into Concord to do trading. And Patience Sheridan rode over on her father's sled when she had the opportunity and they spent the day together.

She and Patience talked, for the most part, about their Philadelphia trip and the romance that had overtaken them on the way. At times Melody would enter into the spirit of it all. But other times she was cross and declared she never wanted to see that Phillip Walton again. Him — sitting there listening to her poor babies read and cipher and spell for dear life — and her job!

It was such a heart-warming place, the Merrill household, and especially the Merrill kitchen, that in bad weather when not much could be done on the farms other than tend stock or put implements into spring-working condition, the girls and their husbands and Rosanna and Nath bundled up the babies and went home in sleds, as often as they could, that they might all be together.

It was such a day in the middle of February and Melody stood at the long ironing board which was laid from window sill to table and spread a green-flowered frock upon it, with twenty-four ruffles from waist to hem. And she talked about her Brier's Nesters.

"The only thing is," she was saying, as she tapped a wet finger to the iron and began on the top ruffle, "I just worry my head if those Millspaugh young ones are by themselves, trying to make-do as best they can with their father off straddling snowdrifts and making up with all the women for miles around. Getting

himself in well with them, come chicken-frying time!"

"What scandalous talk, Mel!" Emmeline, in a big white apron that covered her second-best cashmere, was stirring up a corn pone for dinner. "My arm gets so tired beating," she complained, and Melody took the spoon from her hand and pushed her toward the ironing board. "I'll beat a while," she said, "and you go on with the ruffles. I've finished two."

Caroline peeled potatoes and Rosanna sat sewing on a little white woolen petticoat, while her baby sat on the floor before her with a string of wooden spools. Two babies were asleep upstairs and Rosanna's twins were in the parlor looking at the books Louisa Alcott had given Melody for her Brier's Nesters.

Mrs. Merrill now took the big flatiron from Emmeline's hand, with a quilted cloth holder, and set her to taking the butter out of the churn. "Work some out right away and we'll have it fresh with the hot pone," she said.

"I've only ironed two ruffles, Ma," Emmeline told her. "Well, if there don't come Patience and Mr. Sheridan!"

As Patience sprang over the side of the sled into a snowdrift and ran laughing into the kitchen there began a jolly, brand-new and louder dither of: "Come in and shake off the snow!"

"I'll make a boiler of hot coffee. You must drink a cup before dinner to warm you up!"

"How does your Ma come on, Patience? Why didn't she ride over with you?"

"Howery, Mrs. Merrill, Rosanna — Howery young'uns!" For now the twins had joined the hubbub. Patience grabbed up the big-eyed, unsuspecting baby from the floor and swung him half-way to the ceiling.

"Listen, Melody, I've got the grandest news you ever heard in all your life! Mrs. Farragut is going to take us, the Charm School-

ers, to New York just as soon as travel opens up. Railroad office says it ought to be the first of next week. The stage to Boston started running again yesterday and everything will be in full swing in a couple of days, they say.

"Of course, all the girls can't go but most of them have signed up. It's educational, you know. Mrs. Farragut says any lady must know how to travel in a genteel manner. And Mel, Mrs. Farragut said she would take you if you want to go. You have no school now and I asked her. And we're going to one of those séances in New York. Where they have the rapping spirits. Just for fun, you know. Mrs. Farragut is just in for everything like that. Now I have my things off — you give me the iron, Mrs. Merrill, and take him," for Rosanna's baby had crawled over to his grandmother and was tugging at her skirts.

"I've ironed only two of the ruffles," said Mrs. Merrill, giving way.

"Melody, you've got to come! What else do you think we're going to do in New York? We're going to have our likenesses taken! Oh, I simply can't wait! Say she can go, Mrs. Merrill."

Although Melody was a schoolteacher and told her pupils what to do, she still asked her mother's permission for such trips and would, of course, as every good daughter did, until the day she was married. But it was Melody, herself, who objected.

"Why, Patience, you know I have to get back to my school just as soon as the roads are broken. I can't go gallivanting round as if I had no responsibility. But it would be fun. And educational too, I can see that. Sometimes I feel so — so know-nothing."

"I wish we could manage so you could go," declared her mother. "I know that some don't think their daughters should be on the go, hither and yon, but it seems to me there can't be any harm in seeing how other folks live and manage, even city

folks. When just the two of you went to Philadelphia I was afraid it would make talk, but I guess when well-brought-up girls behave like ladies, nobody is going to say anything. And it seems that when a woman settles down in her own family she never gets to travel round much. Now you seemed to enjoy the trip to Philadelphia and learned new things and saw sights, and all."

The two girls cast round their eyes at each other. Indeed, they had both enjoyed that trip. And they had certainly seen sights, handsome ones. Melody, perhaps, had enjoyed it more than Patience had. Because Patience had never seen her young man again as Melody had, since Mr. Phillip Walton was certainly in evidence. In fact, it seemed that he was constantly bobbing up, now here, now there. In Concord one day. Off to Boston another. Then back again, maybe at Dugan's Corners. There seemed something very strange about his maneuvers, for he hovered around schools and school boards; that was the report. Some said he even taught a few days here and a day or two there. It looked as if he should be able to find himself a school that suited, said some. Yes, there was something decidedly mysterious about the whole thing, Melody and Patience and Louisa Alcott had agreed.

"Yes, Melody, it would be nice for you to go along to New York," Rosanna said, as she took the iron from Patience. "Here, I'll iron a while. Just stand Thanny in the wood box, Mother, so he won't wander round under foot. But here come Father and the boys for dinner."

As they all sat around the big table eating the midday dinner of hot roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, the hot corn pone covered lavishly with the fresh, still-soft butter, the great slabs of rich mince pie, Patience again took up her wheedling of

Melody to go to New York, and everybody joined her.

"But I must get back to my school. You all know that. I signed a contract. And, Mother, you won't believe how those children are all just waiting for me to come back; I know they are. Why, most of them, away out there in the country, not close enough ever to be taken to Boston or even to Concord, why they just feel school is some place to go. And they feel we are all, well, a kind of family. And I do too. They're lonely for one another — and maybe for me. And I know I am lonely for them."

"Oh, Melody, come on and go with us now! I'll tell you; why don't you write and ask the Board if you can't postpone opening the school for another week, since it's been closed this long?" Patience was persuasive.

"A week or so more on the end won't matter anyway and you said you wanted to be up there in the spring. And just think, Mel, we could get our spring-trading done and have clothes this summer right from New York. Between you and me and the gate-post, that is why Mrs. Farragut wants to go, as much to see the styles as the educational sights. She likes to dress up."

"Well — yes," said Melody. She remembered the McGuffey's Readers. And she remembered a purse full of emptiness, the beaded reticule that Mrs. Farragut had passed on to her. But only her mother knew that she had put her salary back into the books for her own pupils, and she apparently thought that this was no time to tell it.

"Your father and I can manage anything it may cost over what you have from teaching, Melody," said her mother quietly, as she poured milk over corn pone for a twin. "We can spare some for your trip."

Melody reached across and touched her mother's sleeve, gratefully, but she still pondered.

"No, I'm sorry, Patience," said Melody firmly, remembering the eager faces of Jody and Mehitable and even of the big, cow-hide-booted Millspaugh boys and Tobe and Dave, no less pathetic in their wistful hoydenishness, though the big boys would have little time now that spring farm work was upon them. The Millspaughs had not been intelligently taught to farm and their futile efforts, with much labor and poor results, would be the garden that Sarah insisted upon. The more reason, Melody told herself, that she go back to Brier's Nest and get in every day of schooling for them all that she could. And not only the schooling; she had to go out and look about the farm as well as see what needed doing in the house; how Gramma was faring. She wished Millspaugh were some fine, good man who could get himself a nice wife and the children a mother.

"Maybe if Mrs. Farragut plans some kind of a trip next summer I can go but not now, Patience. But say — why don't you ask Louisa Alcott?"

"She would be fun," Patience said, "but I know without asking her that she could not go. You know they're so poor — I mean they don't have much money, but it would be nice to ask her. Let's go over now while I'm here. Can we go cross fields? Will the snowcrust hold us up? We could go around the road but it would be a far piece. Mrs. Farragut said everyone should let her know as soon as possible."

The two girls put on their boots that buckled halfway up to their knees, their mantles and heavy hoods and mittens. Mrs. Merrill wrapped a loaf and two-thirds of a brown, baked ham in a clean, old tablecloth and put them in a basket for them to take along.

"Why, my good land, Mother, you know Bronson Alcott won't touch a bite of meat!" Melody laughed as she watched her.

"I did not put it in for Bronson Alcott," Mrs. Merrill told her so crisply that everyone had to laugh. "And it is not charity; it's neighborliness. Look — there's Nath back from Concord. Open the door, Emmeline, he has his arms full of packages."

At this news and name the baby in the wood box crowded and looked toward the door and the twins ran to it. Nathan came in, stamping and brushing snow.

"There's the oiled calico you wanted, Rosanna. You said to get red but green was all they had so I took it."

Rosanna plumped the sadiron down and Emmeline took it up. "It seems like this dress is awfully dry, Ros, how many ruffles have you done?"

"Two," said Rosanna. "The two top ones."

"Good lands of living, that dress must be done up in the brown; we've all had a crack at it, as my young scholar, Harriet Buford, would say — well, forever more!" And Melody stood aghast as she examined the green-flowered frock upon the ironing board.

"Why, I ironed the top two," said Emmeline.

"No, it was the two top ones that I did myself," declared Mrs. Merrill. "Patience here — "

"I started top and finished two," said Patience. And then the whole room burst into an uproar of laughter.

"The two top ruffles of Miss Melody's frock have been ironed the whole day long, it seems." Nathan laughed. "In fact they must be just about worn out!"

Now Mrs. Merrill began unwrapping Nathan's parcels and she carefully smoothed the wrapping papers. Paper was still not a thing to be thrown away, most people felt, though that, Mr. Merrill said, was from early habit because everybody, at least in the store business, now had as much as they needed.

There were some trace chains for Nathan and some knitting needles for Mrs. Merrill. There was tea and coffee, still green, to be browned, though sometimes one could get it ready-browned, these progressive days. And there were green and yellow and purple-striped bags of hard candy for the babies.

"Oh, here is a letter, Melody. I almost forgot it. When a young lady is modern and takes up teaching school she certainly gets important with having mail carried round by the government for her. Ebenezer Farragut said he was ready to strike out, cross fields, and bring it to you. I told him that was just so he could find out who it was from." Nathan laughed.

"A letter? For me?"

"For you, Melody? Whom on earth from?" That was Patience.

Melody opened the new-styled envelope that was all sealed roundabout, ends as well as sides, and took the sheet of foolscap out and opened it. Everybody was frankly interested. It looked well-thumbed. Rosanna's mother observed the envelope with the stamp upon it.

"Six cents," said Bethinda's husband, Bart, "that means it's from somebody within thirty miles distance."

"Yes," said Nathan, "if it were twenty-five cents postage we would know that it came from foreign parts, four hundred and fifty miles distant or more."

"Boys, don't tease the child. Let her read it," admonished their mother. "I don't see either of you fellows getting a letter in the government post office every day."

Melody did read it. And she seemed to read it again. Then she flung the letter at them and flung herself toward the stairway.

"Anyway," she cried, "I'm glad the mean old, miserable old thing had to pay the six cents himself, to send it! Back last year

I would even have had to pay the postage myself." But she seemed about to cry.

Instead of going up the stairs, however, before anybody could pick up the letter, Melody whirled and snatched it from the floor. And with eyes misty but with voice never faltering, she read:

*"My dear and most esteemed Miss Melody Merrill: It is with pleasure that I seat myself with pen in hand to drop you a few lines to let you know that I am well and hope you are the same. And I hereby inform you that Brier's Nest school is being took over by a man-teacher from this day forward, by Mr. Phillip Walton from the city of Boston. I beg, my dear and esteemed madam, to sign myself your most obedient and humble servant,
Brother Silas Millspaugh."*

Brother Millspaugh's name as humble and obedient servant was not the one Melody fairly hissed over her small, red tongue, however. No, it was the name of that fine Mr. Phillip Walton, from the city of Boston.

And crumpling the letter, she flung it into the wood box. "Come on, Patience," she said, though deceiving none of them with her bravado. "Let us go over to the Alcotts' and make plans for that trip to New York!" And she stalked out of the kitchen, followed meekly by Patience.

Melody plunged into every snowdrift right up to her middle, and purposely, her friend thought. Patience wished that she might say something to comfort her. They crossed the lower pasture, sometimes the thawing ice and snow giving way under their feet and letting them into holes. They climbed over the snake fence and into the Big Road, the middle of which was slick and glassy-looking from sled runners. Then down through the Milldam Meadow.

"Honey, I know just how you feel! I never in all my born days heard anything so mean! But anyway you will go to New York and have fun."

"Here — let's go up the hill a little way to the stump," said Melody. "That's where Louisa and I have our post office. We bring letters when we're too busy to run clear across. And she likes to be sentimental anyway, I sometimes think. Maybe she's left one."

Melody tramped up the snowy hill, and Patience, glad now that her friend showed interest in something, and that she was surely going to be of the New York party, recovered her spirits and bounded on ahead a little. Suddenly she turned back and stopped dead still and stared accusingly at Melody.

"Melody Merrill! Why, you know it is never Louisa — Why, look there! Post office with letters from Louisa Alcott! You big old deceiver you! You know those are never Louisa's footprints!"

Melody stared at the ground and then she too sprang ahead and looked more closely. Coming right up to the stump on the opposite side were, most certainly, footprints. And going back from the stump, back in the same direction from which they had come, were the same footprints. But Patience was right. They were never the footprints of Louisa or any woman. They were, unmistakably, the footprints of a man.

Melody caught her breath suddenly and stood staring. Then she said, "Patience! I never in all my life! I never did! Why, I'm — I'm scared! Honestly, it's the stump Lou and I use for our post office. Nobody in the world knows about it but us — and you, now. I must look. I hope nobody took a letter out to tell it round and laugh at us."

"Maybe some prowler," said Patience.

Melody stepped over to the stump and put her mitten hand

into the hole—and drew out a white envelope. It was no such letter as Louisa would have left. It was sealed but there was no stamp. For the second time that day Miss Melody Merrill had the distinction of receiving a personal letter. She tore open the envelope and took out a sheet of paper and read. Then she held it out before Patience's astonished eyes. "Read! Read, will you?" she commanded.

Patience stared at the page, and then she read, half to herself and half aloud, in incredulous wonder and surprise:

"*My dear Miss Melody:*

Something is going to happen, and very soon, that I am afraid will make you hate me. Please don't, darling! I was led to believe you did not care for something I thought you loved. I have been made very unhappy by certain news and now I am beginning to wonder if it was true. It is necessary for me to find out, first hand, all I can about certain matters. Some day I hope to explain everything to you. I cannot say more now but I hope this letter reaches you before the one from Boardman Millspaugh does.

Always yours sincerely,
Phillip Walton.

"Oh, Mel! Mel, honey! Why it's nearly the same as a love letter! It is a love letter! I never in all my born days—My, honey, I guess you're all excited. But what does he mean? It is all so—so mysterious! You're just shaken, Mel, and who wouldn't be?"

"I'm not shaken, I'm just plain mad!" Melody told her. "Now come on and let's get ourselves over to Louisa's. This rate, of spending half my time in reading correspondence from fine gentlemen, young and old, I never will get to New York and have myself any fun!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

RAPPING SPIRITS

WOULD MR. Phillip Walton put all of Brother Millspaugh's clever practices of studying spelling, reading and ciphering, into practice at Brier's Nest school, Melody wondered. Would he hobnob with Millspaugh every night after supper, instead of being able to prepare his next day's lessons? And would Mr. Phillip Walton peel potatoes and make the Millspaugh youngsters' beds comfortably for them after school hours, as she had done? She wondered, a little sadly but a little angrily, too, what Phillip would do with all of the Brier's Nest children and what they would do without her. They needed her; she knew they did. Especially the Millspaugh clan.

Would he see that small Sylvester had his place by the stove when he arrived at school with wet feet? Could he help the two older girls to arrange their hair, or cut a pinafore out of an old dress skirt? Could he make the soup so that Gramma would take it no matter how dauncy she felt? And could he keep the lilt of fun that the two older boys had acquired since she came among them? This lilt of fun she was prouder and gladder of having taught them than of any words they had learned to spell. Certainly, Mr. Phillip Walton could not furnish a fine black curl-

cluster to pin upon the red pig-tailed head of Jody Mullins.

Melody had felt herself more than teacher for her pupils, especially for the Millspaughs. Yes, she had mothered them as best she could with her own few years. She had worried when their father took one of his circuit-riding hankerings. She could see that it was only fear of public opinion that, even now, kept him from forsaking his family for what he extenuatingly called "the grace." The grace, Melody sniffed, of chicken dinners and fine, knitted socks and sweet palaver, tendered by the admiring ladies of his preaching stations throughout the countryside.

She had, in some of the children's more desperate moments, felt that did his calls take him often enough and far enough, she might even accept his marriage proposal and go there to live with the children, not knowing what a child she, herself, still was.

But now she need have no further worry, she told herself grimly. The problem had been taken right out of her lap. She could go about her own business and have fun the remainder of the winter and try for a new school next year.

At any rate she could, with a clear conscience, go to New York with Mrs. Farragut and her Charm School and see the city sights. Her experience in travel might make her more eligible to get a school next year. It gave a girl prestige to be known as one of Mrs. Farragut's protégées. Mrs. Farragut was well known in Boston for her chaperonage tours and the hotel proprietors just hopped around when she came there on one of them. New York would learn.

Of course it would have been more fun could Louisa Alcott have been of the party but, just as Melody had expected, sufficient money for expenses had not been possible.

Melody was one of the merriest of the eight girls as they came into Boston on the train that late February day and as the defer-

ential trainmen helped them all down the steps of the coach it was like unloading a basket of flowers, so ruffled and ribboned and lace-frothed they all were, in their best bibs and tuckers.

Some had bright green or blue or rose pelisses but both Patience Sheridan and Bethinda Hollis were fashionable in short, fur jackets, and the gay, wee, flowered and plumed bonnets rode atop the waves of every head. Mrs. Farragut was, if anything, more resplendent than any of her charges. She had always loved stylish dress. Now there was much laughter and gayety. Mrs. Farragut claimed that laughter had its place, soft laughter, and that place was nearly everywhere and always. There had been a fashion once, she conceded, that ladies should be seen and not heard. That, of course, was in olden times. It applied only to children in this day and age.

Now, when all of the valises and satchels and catchalls were established in one of the best Boston hotels for the night, Mrs. Farragut sent out a message to the four rooms where the young ladies would sleep, two and two. It was a surprise. While the trading for clothes and the sight seeing was really planned for New York, still they were not going to spend one night of their trip in wastefulness here in Boston. Things went on here, too.

So the message said not one of the Charm Schoolers was to remove her stays or wet her hair in quince juice. Instead she was to freshen up and immediately after supper they would all go out for some fun.

The girls fairly hugged themselves and each other and pitied all the other girls back home who could not be under Mrs. Farragut's chaperonage and have such larks. And be made into a perfect lady at the same time without even knowing it, Bethinda Hollis declared.

"First, young ladies," Mrs. Farragut explained as they set out

from their hotel after supper, "we are all going to 47 Bond Street and have one of the water-cure treatments. Doctor Shew and his assistant, Mrs. Gove — "

"But, Mrs. Farragut, dear, I'm not — I don't need treatment for anything! I'm in the pink of condition and — "

"You are, indeed!" Mrs. Farragut told Bethinda crisply. "You are too pink, and whether it is from too much meat or the stench from that New Paradise powder I told you not to use, I don't know. It seems the powder would fair blanch a body just to smell it without ever putting it to a cheek. You are, Bethinda, so healthy that you are indelicate. A lady can be healthy and proud of it after forty but not before. Perhaps this water cure will help me in thinning you down some. No, I claim that no young girl should weigh a pound more than a hundred and forty before she is sixteen and I don't care what Sarah Hale says in her *Lady's Book!*"

In the inner room at 47 Bond Street were cubbyholes curtained with brown calico, and Mrs. Farragut and each of her girls was shown into one. In the cubbyhole the only furniture was a cot. Patience dropped down upon her cot and began giggling, and then Melody, hearing her, laughed outright. The other girls, hearing their mirth through the calico curtains, joined in. While the stony-faced attendants stood at the curtains' opening, looking on with disapproval, the whole crew was soon in gales of laughter. But the attendants attended to that.

The hilarious Miss Patience found herself swathed in a hot, wet towel quicker than it takes to tell it. And so did everyone else, dignified chaperon included. And when the hot towel was whisked off an ice-cold one was whisked on. Then another hot one. And wool blankets and comforters on top of them. Soon everybody was perspiring for dear life. In half an hour, they were

told, the wet wrappings would be changed, and every half hour until relaxation.

"We should have come early in the morning," Mrs. Farragut called to anyone who was unwrapped enough to hear. "We should have made a day of it. By the looks of this we will go into New York not beautiful but boiled. I say — let us get up and get out!" And that was exactly what they did, much to the consternation and disapproval of Doctor Shew and his grim staff.

The Charm School had a wonderful time but its mistress was glum all the way back to the hotel.

"I don't know what your parents would say about me taking you to this sanitorium," she worried, "but if there was any place in the world where a body would expect to find genteel decorum it would be in one of them. And I didn't know we were going to be bathed, by main force, you might say. It seemed kind of — immodest."

"Now, Mrs. Farragut, honey, don't you mind!" comforted the girls. "It was dark anyway and the nurses could not see that we were undressed. I think it was perfectly proper!"

"Anyway it was fun," declared Bethinda Hollis. "And I kept my shift on the whole time."

"Bethinda Hollis! You'll die of pneumonia if not of immodesty! I'll have to get you back to that hotel so quick it will make your head swim! And you mind, you get yourself right into bed, dry and warm." Being a chaperon was a job, poor Mrs. Farragut sighed to herself, and felt to see if her collar was not a little wet. These wild youngsters were always wanting to do something exciting like taking the water cure and the like.

From Boston the Charm School traveled to New York by train and the first day or two there was given over to trading. Mrs. Farragut could travel in to Boston and even here to New York, at

times, and keep posted as to what was what. She was a great help to her husband in his small store.

This modern transportation was something to wonder about, with trains here and there and everywhere, and more tracks being built all roundabout the country. Now in the cities the people could just give their names and the town where they lived and in less than a whipstitch there was the goods right on their own counters. It was just such a trip to trade in the city that had first given Mrs. Farragut the idea of chaperoning. She did not like to go about among the city wonders alone and enjoyed laughing and having a lot of fun. Girls to come along seemed the thing. Most married women were too busy, and anyway they didn't laugh much. And so, the fee of chaperonage frequently covered a nice bill of goods.

With everyone's trading done, came the entertainment. Of course they all wanted to see Barnum's Museum. Most of all they wanted to hear the rapping spirits there. And so, on their third day in New York, everybody dressed up and set out to the circus.

"It will take maybe a couple of days to make the rounds," Mrs. Farragut said. "It's a good thing I got Ebnezer's stuff for the store first. Maybe later I wouldn't have had anything left to pay for it with. A body sure can spend money in the city."

"Yes! I feel kind of scared when we eat in the restaurants; everything is so high," declared Trudy Hancock. "It's a plate of beefsteak and potatoes here, ten cents — dish of ham and cabbage, a little bread, butter and coffee, maybe a doughnut or two, fifteen cents — dish of ice cream a nickel — a body sure can spend money in the city, Mrs. Farragut!"

Melody, dipping frequently into her small, beaded reticule, had been thinking the same thing but still she was doing very well.

As they all made their way to downtown New York on the horsecars Mrs. Farragut told what she knew of these rapping spirits. She had been reading about them in all of the New York and Boston and Philadelphia papers. The whole country seemed heated up about them, and the subject had a good many mighty smart men at their wits' end, she declared.

"And these acts I want you to see at Barnum's," Mrs. Farragut explained, "it seems there are two sisters, the Fox girls, Margaret and Catherine, I think they are called. They say they come out on the stage and a man in the act says, 'What person in the audience is thinking of a dead loved one?' And somebody holds up his hand. Then the man says to these Fox girls, 'Is it a woman?' If it is you can hear a rapping, three times, just as plain, for yes. If only twice that means no, it is a man. And the girls just stand there before everybody, the papers say. You can see that it is not them. Well, it seems they can just tell anything a body wants to know about the dead, where they are, and what they're doing, just with rapping.

"Some claim it is all a trick, and it may be, I don't know. I was reading something about that in the paper, too. It said nobody had ever heard of rapping spirits till this family of Ellis Fox in Hydesville, Wayne County, New York, began hearing sounds in the walls. Right away they knew that it was spirits. Well, everybody began trying to talk with them but only the girls could get any answer. It seems their mother thought it was so wonderful, she wrote a letter to her older daughter in Rochester, Mrs. Leah Fish, I think her name was.

"Well, this sister, she knew a good thing when she saw it, the paper hinted, and so she up and sent for them to come down to Rochester and she made a kind of show with them. She charged

a dollar, a whole dollar, mind you, to let people listen to the rapping spirits.

"Now it will cost us more. Since Barnum took them into his show, the papers says, it costs two dollars. They say they are in a room where they used to have the petrified mermaid. But if a body can talk to all of her loved ones who have gone on I think it is well worth the money. Maybe you girls had better save your money for something more interesting though — you're young. You wouldn't have so many to hear rap."

Despite Mrs. Farragut's gay-feathered bonnet and her powder, not the whiff from Paradise that she had warned Bethinda against, she looked sad, and what was sadder, Melody thought, a little old. Mrs. Farragut would perhaps hear much rapping for her two dollars. Many of her friends must have gone on before.

But everyone wanted to hear the spirits, two dollars or not, and so they settled into the audience with some giggling and much curiosity. The Fox Sisters were as pretty as they could be, as pretty as the Charm Schoolers themselves, Melody thought. And the thought that these girls were working for their money, just as she did, surprised her for a moment. It must be rather gruesome to be working with dead and gone spirits instead of with little live, bright and laughing children with McGuffey's Readers in their hands.

The sisters wore low-necked frocks and there were flowers in their hair, and the man who handled their act wore evening dress and he carried the smart little red whip of the showman. Everybody who showed anything, from a working mind to a piece of livestock, carried the little red whip. It was the emblem of professional entertainment.

"Now, Margaretha," the man was saying, "I feel the spirit of

some great departed in this room at this moment. Who is it, Margaretha?"

"It is — it is — Shakespeare!" declared Margaretha, clawing the air as if for inner sight.

"And, Margaretha, he speaks. I hear him speak. But I, with my earthly wit do not get his message. What is his message, Margaretha?"

The beautiful girl lifted up her hands again and she lifted up her face with her eyes closed. The rappings went steadily on, from exactly where nobody could quite determine.

"He says — Shakespeare says you ain't believing what I say — I mean what *he* says, you can take your foot in your hand and run for tall timber, 'cause everything I say is so!"

Melody put her face down and giggled. Shakespeare or his spirit talking like a country bumpkin, Patience's eyes said to her when she caught them! And Mrs. Farragut, too, was amused and when the act was over she herded her young ladies back to the hotel for dinner.

But nobody even took off a bonnet or loosened a corset string. Only another day or two and the fun would be over, but the trip home would be fun, too, of course. In the afternoon they would go back to see more sights. They would attend another of Barnum's attractions, the Scudder Museum at Broadway and Elm Streets.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE THING TO REMEMBER

“I WANT to see Washington’s nurse, this Joyce Heth,” said Mrs. Farragut, as they set out again for the afternoon. “I read about her in the *Pennsylvania Enquirer*. Big piece about her.”

“Oh, I do too,” declared Bethinda Hollis. “They say she is about a thousand years old.”

“You and your exaggeration, Bethinda! Barnum, himself, says that she is only a hundred and sixty-one,” chided Mrs. Farragut. But here they were, before a tent showing a beautiful young woman smiling along at the age of a hundred and sixty-one, as letters a foot high beneath her picture declared. And Mrs. Farragut bought tickets for them all.

“Now mind, you’re a party of genteel young ladies out sightseeing and be decorous,” she admonished them, smartly.

They all took seats on the wooden boards, though everybody was just scared, of course, that the splinters would fair ruin their good gowns. That bold Bethinda turned her ruffles up to a good height when Mrs. Farragut was not looking. A soft, droning music issued from behind curtains. Then a gentleman who might have been George Washington, himself, in his purple-silk

knee breeches, and ruffled silk shirt, with the inevitable red whip, made his dignified appearance.

"Lad — ee — eez and Gentle — ee — men!" He lifted up his chin and sounded forth his words like a clarion call. "I am about to present to you positively the oldest woman on the face of the earth! In just a moment you will see, with your own two eyes, the famous Joyce Heth that the world has acclaimed the oldest living woman in the world. Dainty, darling Miss Heth will laugh with you and talk with you, and you will never again fear old age when you see how gracefully she has met it. Lad — ee — eez and Gentle — men! The oldest woman in the world."

The curtains slowly parted and the breathless audience saw before them a creature they could well believe was one hundred and sixty-one years old. She sat hunched in her decrepit rocking chair. When the circus master bade her smile at her dear audience, her lips moved a little, showing vacancies where teeth must once have been. And she was, to all appearances, blind.

"Miss Heth, ladies and gentlemen, was born a slave in Bethel, Connecticut. Miss Heth, will you be kind enough to tell us some of the most interesting experiences in your long and noble life? Do you, for instance, remember a famous man, Miss Heth? George Washington, perhaps. Do you remember him?"

"I do, indeed," declared the old woman. "I was present at his birth, the dear little fellow. I remember that as I pinned his first diaper upon him there was a shout in the street and there went the redcoats marching by!"

"Redcoats marching by — why they were in the time of the Revolution, weren't they?" hissed Bethinda Hollis.

"What I want to know," said Mrs. Farragut who, in her intense interest at what she saw, had forgotten to be on the lookout for gentility, "is how she could be his nurse. Why the way I figure it,

she would have been three years old when he was born, roundabout that, anyway. Big, hefty baby he was, and a handful for any grown woman, out chopping cherry trees down, like cornstalks, round six or seven!" Others in the audience were skeptical, too, and a whisper of "India rubber and springs" went around.

"But india rubber and springs couldn't talk!" declared Mary-ann, believing as always.

"Now I think we ought to see the model of Niagara Falls," said Mrs. Farragut. "That's something educational, not that everything we've seen and heard hasn't been; it has. But everybody is asking everybody else, these days, have they seen Niagara Falls, it's that popular. So we'll see the model anyway. Then if anybody asks us have we seen the Falls we can just say yes. We don't need to mention how big it was."

The girls loved things like this in Mrs. Farragut — perhaps more than their mothers did. She had imagination and she managed things always for the best, even Niagara Falls.

The Falls was, in fact, no more than eighteen inches high. But it was a wonderwork of man, if not of God. All of the surrounding scenery was in proportion to the Falls. Trees, rocks and the like were minute and exact replicas of those actually surrounding the Falls. And the water, tumbling down constantly with never a pause, was furnished by a concealed pump.

"Look, Melody! I know they're bride and groom," whispered Patience in an aside to Melody. And Melody thought they were too. The girl kept one hand on the back of her voluminous skirt and petticoats, holding them up carefully out of the dirt, and she kept her other hand fondly within her young man's crooked arm.

"It's the Falls where you always wanted me to take you, dear," he said loudly, and proudly, the girls thought, "but it is kind of small."

And she answered, as she beamed up at him from under her big portico of hat, "Yes, it is, dear. But just as good as the real ones. And we saved around ten dollars to buy chickens, and shingles for the new roof. We can always say 'we saw Niagara Falls on our honeymoon' and it will be the truth."

So others managed as well as Mrs. Farragut and themselves, thought Melody, with a little satisfaction.

"Well now, let us see that little man," said Mrs. Farragut. "I saw that tent farther down this way. That Phineas Barnum is not so dumb as a body would think, with him getting all these dummies and freaks and such things together. Maybe he won't do so bad with his shows; you never can tell. He might make it pay and make himself a lot of money."

"My father was reading about him in the paper the other day and he said that too," said Ann Pruitt. "Father knew him well when they were boys. This Mr. Barnum was born at Bethel, Connecticut, close to Grandfather Pruitt's."

"That's where they said that little old woman, Joyce Heth, was born, too," said Patience. "Do you suppose Mr. Barnum grew up and just saw her roundabout so long and getting so old and still hanging on, do you reckon he said to himself 'maybe I could start myself a show, get a few other freaks and mummies and odd things together?'"

But here was the tent of Tom Thumb. The little man, pictured on the side of the tent, wearing an outfit of military cut, was called General Tom Thumb. And he was by far the merriest and the most worth while to see, Melody thought, of any of the attractions.

"This young military man that you see before you is General Tom Thumb," the showman declared. "He has only just arrived from England and you lucky people are seeing him in one of his

very first appearances. General Tom Thumb is twenty-two years of age and he is not quite twenty inches tall. He weighs twelve pounds. Look at his beautiful blond hair and his blushing little cheeks. Isn't he the little doll, ladies? How would you like to take him home with you?"

The little general only blushed the more but he was not embarrassed, and he sang songs and told stories and was charming enough for any girl to take home, everyone declared.

Well, it had been a day, and Mrs. Farragut was shepherding her girls out of the last show tent, ready to start back to their hotel, when Maryann Bolger cried, "Oh! the egress, Mrs. Farragut, dear! We haven't seen that! Let's do see it! I have some money left. Let us see the egress!"

"Oh, me too! I want to see it, don't you, Melody?" that was Bethinda. "But — what is an egress? Makes me feel creepy just to say it."

"We haven't seen what?" asked Mrs. Farragut blankly, thinking they had surely seen everything under the shining sun, or moon, if she were to judge by her own small, aching feet in their pretty shoes.

Maryann pointed to the sign. It was just outside the gate. *This Way to the Egress* it read. But Mrs. Farragut did not laugh or even smile. She simply walked through the gate and gave Patience Sheridan a good, hard look when she sniggered at Maryann's mistake.

"Well, so many strange things around and so many big words, and all!" poor Maryann defended herself and her error. But she still wondered what an egress was.

Back at the hotel, with supper over, the girls sat about in Mrs. Farragut's room in comfortable wrappers and applied quince juice to the hair and the new, fashionable face cream to the face.

This cream Patience and Maryann had purchased back in Concord from Ebenezer Farragut's store, especially for the trip. Ebenezer kept much of such stock since he had married the Widow Miles and had her knowing, womanly advice.

Mrs. Farragut now sat with her own soft, thick hair down and not a mite of Ravinia Tinctorina berry upon her cheeks, because she was still pretty enough not to need it. She passed up the cold cream that was so generously offered and interested herself in a newspaper. Suddenly she laughed out.

"Well, girls, some of you said that the Fox Sisters talked like country bumpkins in their trancing around there, but it looks like we were the naive ones! If this paper tells the truth there is a lot in this big city to fool young girls from Concord. May be true, too. I just had my suspicions all along, about some things I've seen in this big place!"

"Why? What is it, Mrs. Farragut? Read us what it says," begged Maryann.

"Well, maybe I ought not to — it might spoil your trip. But it says here: 'Doctor —' Somebody, I can't pronounce his name, 'Professor of Medicine at the University of Buffalo, finds that it is with the cracking of Margaretha's joints that she makes the rapping spirits answer.'"

"Oh, I can't believe that!" cried Maryann, the gullible. "It just seems so terrible for it not to be so. Why, how could anybody crack her bones that way? I can't! See?" She turned and twisted, and then Melody tried it and so did Patience, and soon all of the girls were trying to bring some aging and gruesome sound out of their own pink and white elbows and knees, but to no avail.

And Mrs. Farragut read on.

"Oh, here is something about the little man. It says Tom Thumb never came from England at all, as they stated in the

show. It says he was born right there at Bridgeport, Connecticut, and his name is Charles S. Stratton. General, indeed! It says he is not twenty-two years old at all, but only ten. Well, even at that he is mighty little. This says he got three dollars a week when he first joined the show and his mother's board was thrown in free."

"That makes me — well, a little sad. All of it did, when we were going around looking at them this morning," Melody said.

"Yes. I know what you mean, Melody," Mrs. Farragut told her, "and when we do see such sights the main thing to remember is not how small or how pitiful the other person was — like that little old Joyce Heth. No, the main thing, the important thing to remember is, how big and healthy and right we are, ourselves. And be glad of it. And proud of it. And it is important to act accordingly by keeping ourselves fine and strong and right — both in body and mind.

"Now! Off to bed, all of you! Tomorrow is another day! And mind now, no telling who is in the hall. You, Miss Maryann Bolger, button your wrapper decently and — this way to the egress!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MELODY SITS FOR HER LIKENESS

NEVER HAD that New York hotel seen a finer array of delicate womanhood energetically pull out chairs and sit expectantly down to its breakfast table than it did one morning after the arrival of the Concord Charm School. Mrs. Farragut, herself, led the parade. She was resplendent in a striped gray and rose corded silk, with fine black lace overskirt and small gold buttons marching down the front, forty strong. Her bonnet was of gray velvet with pink, half-blown roses clasping the crown, and plumes of deep rose spouting out of the middle. A pelisse of soft, blue wool completed the picture.

Maryann Bolger wore deep-green sprigged muslin with ribbons on her bonnet to match, and a mound of pink-silk daisies surmounted her brow under the bonnet's rim. Both bonnet and gown were a little crushed and "rushing the season," being from last summer's wardrobe. But still and all, Maryann had told Melody, she had never in her life looked so beautiful in anything as she had in this ensemble, last summer, and who was going to know when they looked at the likeness, that it had been taken in the dead of winter? She had brought it along purposely to "sit" in. Now the low-cut bodice, low even for summer and fourteen

years, left her neck looking as scrawny and cold as the neck of a picked chicken, Mrs. Farragut told her a little crossly when she observed her. But it was too late to change; Maryann had carefully seen to that.

Melody wore her best blue cashmere, though the choice between that and the newer rose wool was hard. But she loved the way the blue sleeve stopped midway between elbow and wrist and thus displayed fine, white, frilled cuffs that came right down to her hand so elegantly, with a frill to match about her throat. And then the skirt had twelve yards in it while that of the rose wool, of course, for schoolroom, had only ten yards. A body didn't like to look skimpy.

Melody planned that for the likeness she would lay off her bonnet and pelisse so as to — well — show her lines a little. Because they were good. A body couldn't help knowing if she had curves, certainly. And with the bonnet off, the curl-cluster showed to better advantage. Of course Jody Mullins had pulled at that one curl on the left side, when she forgot to spell a word, till it had hardly any spring left. But no matter, a hairpin here and there would brace it up. Oh, if only Louisa Alcott had been along for all this fun, Melody's cup would have been full to the brim.

Now the lovely rose and green and blue bodices all down the table grew tighter and the little buttons did their utmost bravely as their wearers took second helpings of hominy and ham meat and fried eggs and hot biscuits and apple sauce and cherry pie and crullers.

"Oh, I just can't believe it's true, with all the wonders I've been seeing, that I'll be sitting for my likeness to boot!" declared Patience.

"Not 'to boot,' Patience; 'in the bargain' is better," chided Mrs. Farragut.

"Well, I mean, with it all I suppose I'll look scared as a chicken with an axe over its neck. I just wonder now who ever thought up such a thing as taking people's likenesses, or how they even knew there was such a thing to think up."

"I can tell you, Patience," declared Mrs. Farragut. She lifted her voice, not enough to be unladylike or ungenteel, of course, but just enough to make herself heard all down the table, and she preened a bit. They should see that she was a well-informed woman though some still looked down their noses at brainy females.

"Back some years ago," Mrs. Farragut explained, as she daintily minced the crumbs upon her plate with her small and shapely fingers, "it started in Paris. A man by the name of Louis Daguerre and another one — he had a funny French name, too, I can't recall it at the moment, though as a rule I'm so good at remembering names —"

"Joseph Nicephore Niepce" supplied Melody glibly, between bites of buttered biscuit, "I was reading about it in a Boston paper, just the other day."

"Yes. Well, this Nipsy or whatever you call him, it seems he died. Around 1833, I think it said; I'm not just sure, though as a rule I can't be beat on remembering dates. Still the other one, this Daguerre, went right ahead with his project and around 1839 — yes, I'm sure it was 1839, he had it good enough to take likenesses with and so * — well what else did it say, Melody?"

Mrs. Farragut was drawing in her proud horns a little. These youngsters — you never could tell about them. If she started something historical before this crowd at table and some of her girls took it up and made her out wrong! Perhaps everyone did

* *Photography and the American Scene* —Robert Taft

not know that she taught just charm and not book-learning. Just charm.

"Oh, it said just what you have told us, Mrs. Farragut. And it said that Mr. Daguerre showed specimens of his work to the scientific world of Paris. One man, Arago, was secretary of the French Academy of Sciences. He was terribly impressed and so he suggested that if Mr. Daguerre would describe his invention to the public so that anybody, even other nations, could follow it, he would give an annuity to develop and further it. And he did."

"All the newspapers did him proud too," said an old gentleman at the end of the table, where he had been listening quietly, "and mighty right they were."

"And is that why they call them daguerreotypes, Mrs. Farragut?" asked Bethinda Hollis. "Now if Mr. Nipsy had lived maybe they would have called them nipsytypes. And can I—may I—have just one more fried egg? And a biscuit? And maybe just another spoonful of hominy with butter on it?"

"If you wish to make a balloon of yourself do so, Bethinda!" Mrs. Farragut ballooned up from her own place and assembled her gloves and her reticule.

"Cross-town stage! All aboard that's going aboard. Got no time to dawdle!" cried the raucous voice of the stage driver at the door. So everybody must swallow a last bite and wipe the fingers and get hold of the frills and flounces and skitter to the door. It was more fun!

The Concord Charm School, headed by its handsome instructor, entered the daguerreotype parlor with some trepidation and awe. Early as it was though, they were not the first customers.

A woman with two children at her skirts eased this way and that to quiet the one on her hip and she made dabs at the faces

of them all with her handkerchief. The father, a burly man but not at his best now, it was evident, walked the floor and mopped his brow.

"It's a thing that doesn't happen every day," Mrs. Farragut sympathized to her girls, but mostly to him.

Then Melody, as she looked about, noticed a newspaper clipping tacked to the wall. It was from *The Knickerbocker*, a New York paper. Mrs. Farragut bade her read it aloud and she did. It extolled the virtues, the very magic awesomeness of this new invention.

"Oh, I guess it is one of the world's wonders," declared the perspiring man. Then the curtains of an inner room were thrust aside and a young man came panting out. He was followed by the daguerreotyper.

"Now see!" he declared. "It didn't hurt a bit, did it? Well, I told you it wouldn't. Your likenesses will be ready in about a month."

"No, sir, it never hurt me," the young man conceded, "but it scared me mighty bad!" He immediately peeled off the tailcoat and silk stock and handed them to the proprietor.

"Now you put them on and come inside," he invited the burly man. "I know you kind ladies won't mind if I take his likeness first. He seems pretty nervous and all. They do say it's fashionable for ladies to be waited on first in stores and such, same as at a party, though."

The burly one got into the garments then and there. They were a tight fit to say the least and his children observed him wonderfully. Father looked like a strange man. And he looked back at them and at his wife and cleared his throat.

"Maybe we'd better all be took together!" He spoke as if they set out on their Last Trip.

"All right, sir!" boomed the daguerreotyper cheerfully. "There's safety in numbers! You're right about that. And it won't cost you a cent more. All on the same copper piece."

So the entire little family went behind the curtains. And after sharp cries from the children, a groan from the father, and a steady and patient, "Now, quiet please. Now, please!" by the cool, reassuring voice of the daguerreotyper, then long moments of silence, they too emerged, relieved and smiling.

"I don't know if I want to try it or not," said Patience, doubtfully. "Shall I have to get into the stock and tailcoat?" At this the Charm School got into such a dither of giggles that Mrs. Farragut threatened to take them straight back to the hotel.

"You young ladies just contain yourselves or you'll have no likenesses!" she threatened. "Imagine having them taken with your mouths spread, laughing! You're to look serious and genteel and ladylike now if you never did before and never do again! Now, get yourselves squared round in short order!" And she, herself, marched boldly behind the curtain, the first of her party.

No one might accompany the sitter. No, nothing must distract the glassy stare that was so important. Mrs. Farragut needed no supporting and she came out declaring that it had been nothing at all.

"A good way is to clinch your teeth," she advised, and she pushed Patience Sheridan forward for the next sitting.

They could hear Patience receiving instructions: "Now just lift off your hat and lay your pelisse, Miss. Now the elbow just lightly against this urn; fingers of the other hand over the rim only a little, only a very little — not so tight, my dear Miss! You are not going to carry wash suds out in the urn; you are going to put flowers into it, perhaps. The fingers now, spread a bit to show elegance. You prefer the pose with fingers spread upon hip? Yes,

that, too, is equally elegant. All right then—elbow on rim, fingers on hips—stare straight ahead. Beautiful! Beautiful! Hold so now for a while. Don't move—D-o-n'-t m-o-v-e—”

When Melody in her turn entered the curtained room she saw a small, black box mounted upon another black box, the two at about the height of her head. Boxes, of course, were not so frightening. But when what looked exactly like the muzzle of a gun protruded from one of them, that was something to think about. Melody was invited to sit exactly in front of the contraption, but she preferred to stand.

“Well, all right, then. You flounce up your skirts and get your stance, just as you would like to look if you were lying in your coffin and everybody was looking on, and I'll get the machine all set.”

Melody set her blue-flowered skirts wide. She felt to see if her belt was as tight as she could get it. She laid her right arm firmly upon the tall stand table covered with a floor-length cover of brocade, which the man wheeled over—no more of this urn business—and she flexed her fingers; seemed as if she had half a dozen hands to dispose of. She held the fingers of the left hand rigidly straight against the folds of her skirt. She could feel the bones of the Philadelphia corset through the blue cashmere and all of her petticoats. She primmed her lips. She cleared her throat and opened her eyes as widely as she could. No telling who might see this likeness some day. Some young men, she had heard, had taken to carrying the likenesses of certain girls in their pockets, over their hearts.

“Now I'll fix your head,” this man said.

Mercy me! The cold sweat stood out upon Melody's fair brow. He would fix her head. Immediately back of her stood a tall rod with a half-circle of metal at its top. It was curved, and like the

half of a steel wagon tire except that it was smaller. It hugged Melody's slim, little neck coldly when she pushed her head back, above it, as instructed. Now it was impossible for her to look to the right or to the left. Her head was held as in a vise.

"Now you must hold as still as death. Not long though — only eight or ten minutes," he told her. "Don't take any long breaths, please. Eyelids still! Lips firm! Now! Stare straight before you. That's right! That's fine!"

Melody lived a thousand small deaths in ten minutes. Were her lips primmed just right? Maybe too much! Did a bit of lace on a petticoat show beneath her dress? That was one thing for which she had been called gay, for she never could get all six petticoats hitched up so none of them showed. But they were always white as snow; she saw to that. Oh, mercy sakes preserve her, one eye nearly went shut just by accident! What if her likeness came out with her winking? A winking girl and a crowing hen; everybody knew that one!

Now she heard somebody else come into the outer room. She heard the voices of a girl and a man.

"Anybody here to take a body's likeness?" the man shouted boldly, as if he had his likeness taken every day in the week and twice on Sundays. "My little woman here is afraid and I thought I never would get her in, so we would like to get it over with."

Melody was ushered out as the two were ushered in, while the others of her party still sat waiting their turn. She drew that long breath she had been denied for ten minutes, more like ten years, as she crossed the threshold.

And then — such a medley of shricks and wails and exclamations:

"Oh! Melody Merrill!"

"Oh — don't tell me!"

"Mrs. Farragut! Will you look!"

"Well, Melody! Of all the things upon the top of this good, green earth!"

Melody stopped aghast. What was it? What had she done? What had that infernal machine done? They were all staring at her in horror.

"Melody, I am afraid you have made an unfortunate mistake," Mrs. Farragut told her, and with far more gentleness than had she been one of her own students in gentility and fitness and fine womanhood. "You have, Miss Merrill, forgotten your curl-cluster. In your likeness you will probably look as bald as a boiled egg!"

Melody sagged down beside Patience and laid her face upon her comforting shoulder.

"Well, now, you people have been waiting so long, I might as well throw back this curtain and let you look on. Next thing to a show. Make waiting quicker." And the daguerreotyper threw back his curtain.

What the girls of Mrs. Farragut's Charm School saw before them completely spoiled the entire project. There sat the young man who had wanted the hurry-up job, his left leg elegantly crossed over his right, his hard hat held delicately out in his left hand. Behind him and to the right stood the girl. She rested a hand upon her swain's shoulder, delicately but possessively.

"I wish we had some gentleman to be took with. I wish some of the Concord boys had come!" whispered Patience, and Melody, herself, wished the same thing.

"Well ladies, you had come just a little later you would been in luck," declared the daguerreotyper, who had overheard. "Now me, I aim to hire me a man from Philadelphia, does nothing but sit. Ladies come in and want their likenesses, haven't got a man,

why I aim to have my own man to sit with them. This Phineas Cumberland. Aim to have him right here on the job all the time. Pay him wages. He will just sit like this young man sits before me with first one lady and then the other. And when she shows her likeness to her friends — why there she is with a handsome gentleman that every young lady roundabout would just give her eyeteeth to know where she met up with."

While he still stood, pressing the bulb, the girl dropped her handkerchief and snatched for it — and so the whole sitting had to be done over.

"Now how would you like to have one by yourself, sportlike?" the daguerreotyper asked the young man when the first pose was finished. He brought for his inspection a shotgun, some bushes which he explained were to be set up for background, a gamebag, a powder horn, and a stuffed fox.

The young man was elated. Just the thing — fine idea, he declared. So he immediately donned the gamebag over the fine, black, long-coated suit and let it swing under one arm. The powder horn crossed this and hung under the other. The bushes were erected and the gun was leaned against them. Now the inspired proprietor pushed the legs of the stuffed fox into the young man's hands.

"The dog! Where's my dog? How did I catch it?" shouted the fellow, as excited as ever he would be following the hounds on any field or prairie. But this daguerreotype parlor had all modern conveniences, it seemed. No sooner the need of a dog than here the dog is, a small stuffed one. Of course it had marble eyes and was not a hunting dog, as all could see, but why be choosy?

"All right, feller! Let 'er go!" cried the young man, devilishly.

"Now how about another pose? Maybe something romantic for the little lady to cherish in her locket, wear round her neck,

right over her heart?" suggested the daguerreotyper who had had a glimpse of the young man's pocketbook when he had paid for the other two likenesses. Without waiting for refusal he wheeled what appeared to be one of the most elegant divans they had ever seen, right out under the lights. It was a brocaded-satin divan. The springs were not bad. Then he swept up gun and gamebag, fox and dog and countryside bushes and flung them behind a curtain.

"Just seat yourself at ease upon yonder divan," he directed. "Now — lie back, sort of restful. The crop's all in and haying time's not here yet. Now, crook the elbow. Double up the fist and lean the jaw on it. Legs crossed, please. Rakish, eh, ladies? Gives him a complete air of ease, does it not? Gives him an elegance! Now — the proper stare — That's it!"

"Oh, Elmer! It — it's beautiful!" whispered Elmer's girl in an agony of admiration.

The while the Concord Charm Class looked on. It certainly was beautiful!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE CHARM SCHOOL

ON THEIR way back to Concord Mrs. Farragut suggested that Melody share a seat on the train with her. She had something to talk to her about, she said. And what Mrs. Farragut had to talk about was her Charm School. She would like to take on a few more pupils. Sadie Bascomb and Lavida Ann Carpenter had applied for admittance. Mrs. Farragut needed help. Would Melody consider coming in as assistant mistress?

"I know that you're no older than some of my girls, but you're a born lady, and you've had teaching experience there at Brier's Nest. You liked teaching, didn't you?"

"I did," said Melody; "I loved it. But that may have been because my scholars were children. I longed so to help them. This teaching young, grown-up ladies how to behave would be different."

"Well, you think it over and let me know," Mrs. Farragut told her.

As Melody came into the long drive leading up to the farmhouse, carrying her carpetbag and valise, she wondered why nobody had met her with the carryall. They had all known when

Mrs. Farragut and her party would return. Her mother met her at the door.

"It's that old Millspaugh, Melody. He came before sunup asking that Nath sit in prayer with him. He claims he has the call to preach. 'Steady and without ceasing,' he says, not just now and again and here and there as he has been. And he doesn't know what to do with his family. He thinks the Lord should show him the way. And Nath's heart is just not in it. I can see that by the stormy look on his face. Nath thinks Millspaugh's first duty is to take care of those poor children. I guess the two of them in there, and the Lord, are having quite an argument about it. And Mr. Millspaugh seemed very surprised to find you were not at home, Melody."

"Well, let him!" snapped Melody. "I would like to go in there and tell the Lord a few things myself." But, instead, she climbed the stairs to her own room and was just coming down again, a few minutes later, when her brother and Millspaugh came out of the parlor.

"Well, bless my soul, Miss Melody! You're the very first to hear the good news. The Lord has just had his way with me and I have, this hour, determined to put all earthly things aside and set out on his mission, constant and steady. Circuit rider, preaching the word roundabout."

"Have you the credentials for circuit riding, Mr. Millspaugh?" Melody asked him coldly, and she accented the Mr. to let him know that so far as she was concerned he was only mister and not brother.

"Well now, 'course I ain't been appointed formal and gone through with that end of it. But my plans are just to ride roundabout and preach the good word anywheres they've got no preacher. Because we all have to put our own business aside

and get busy with the Lord's. Folks is fair hungry for the Word."

"And he is hungrier for the fried chicken and spoon bread and cherry pie and pound cake that is always spread before a preacher!" Melody declared to her mother as she entered the kitchen and left him standing in the hall with Nathan. "But something ought to be done about those children. That worries me."

Nathan stuck his head in at the kitchen door. A glint of amusement and teasing raillery was in his eye and voice. "Brother Millsbaugh craves a word with you, Sis," he told her.

Melody instantly picked up her skirts and flounced into the parlor. Nathan closed the door between them.

"Miss Melody, now that I have become one of the Lord's anointed, I have hopes that you will think of me different than maybe you have thought of me. Because I know you are an earnest and righteous young woman and want to do all the good in this world that you can, too. That's just what I was telling Mr. Walton — that you had let me look into your heart and showed me that you seen, too, that woman's greatest, most noble work was to stay home and do the things to woman's hand. Maybe you didn't know I was watching you all the time and putting two and two together, but you can't fool me! So, Miss Melody, I've thought it out like this: now why don't you marry me and be a good mother to my children, and that way I would have somebody to leave them with while I'm out on the Lord's work?"

"And, Miss Melody, the children love you like you was their own mother, already. And now there's my Sylvester, my littlest, my ewe lamb as the Good Book says. He's down right now with a sore throat, and if it gets no better I won't be able to leave on

my preaching trip, come Saturday, like I planned. If you would marry me you'd be doing the Lord's own work, Miss Melody."

"I have work of my own, thank you!" declared Melody, and she stepped out of the room and allowed the door to slam in Brother Millspaugh's face.

So that was why she had lost Brier's Nest school! And maybe that was why Mr. Phillip Walton had been willing to take it on. He had been led to believe by this silly twaddle of home loving, by Millspaugh, that she did not like teaching school, no doubt, but had her eye out for a husband. Her face burned red at the thought. How could he help seeing that I loved that school, she thought wrathfully. Still and all, if old Millspaugh had told him — goodness knows what he had told him — Phillip wasn't to blame —

I shall get right into my bonnet and pelerine and get myself over to Mrs. Farragut's Charm School and accept her appointment as assistant mistress, she fumed.

But as the door slammed downstairs upon Millspaugh's departure, she had one cold, little thought clutch her heart. I wonder just how bad poor little Sylvester's throat is, she could not help worrying. And I wonder if that fine young Phillip would know what to do for him if he really were taken ill. And if he did know something to do he probably would not do it, the — the — something or other! Anybody who would take a woman's school away from her! Or believe that she could like an old thing like Millspaugh enough to marry him!

Something is going to happen that I fear will make you hate me. Please don't, darling! Some way, in remembering Phillip's only letter to her she always settled upon that part of it with more concentration than upon the others. But, now, off to Mrs.

Farragut's. She would burn her bridges behind her by getting busy with something that would leave her no time to think of little Millspaughs or big Phillip Walton, that she would!

In Mrs. Farragut's parlor the horsehair chairs were ranged about the wall and in them sat ten young ladies, the cream of Concord's best families, from ages of twelve to eighteen. Mrs. Farragut, herself, sat at a marble-topped stand table in lieu of a desk. And she wore no black gown and prim, white apron such as the few governesses and women schoolteachers wore in the schoolroom.

No, the mistress was resplendent and commanding in a billowing frock of deep-rose satin — billowing in the skirt but decently boned in the basque. A tucker of foamy, white lace climbed over the shoulders and the old tombstone brooch, that she had bought of Ebenezer before their marriage, clasped it in the front. Cushions of cambric, filled with down, puffed the shoulders out fashionably. Mrs. Farragut, of course, wore her curl-cluster. All this, though it was scarcely nine o'clock in the morning.

Melody, being assistant mistress, too, must dress. She wore the rose cashmere with extra cambric petticoats to stand it out and over her bosom was crossed a scarf of fine lace in contrasting blue that had just happened to match her eyes. Her false curls were pinned low in the back and about her head she had tied a narrow, blue riband.

This was her first morning as Mrs. Farragut's assistant. She would much rather have been looking out over the grubby heads of the Brier's Nest clan than at the spouting and elegant curls of these fashionable young ladies, she told herself. Yes, a week had passed and she had heard nothing from either the Millspaugh or

the Walton. And she hoped that never in all her born days would she hear a single cheep out of either one of them. That was what she hoped.

Except that — it just worried a body, wondering how small Sylvester was with his sore throat. Maybe — maybe if she never was going to be married to any young man — to anyone else, maybe —

Now their mistress instructed the young ladies to study the notes she had given them on deportment, and she went into her bedroom to see in the mirror how her tucker was setting.

Yes, maybe — mused Melody, unhappily, if she never was going to be married, like other women, and maybe if she would not get another school, a school of children, not these silly sallys —

“Attention, young ladies!” Mrs. Farragut had adjusted her tucker to her satisfaction and now she again sat at the marble-topped table.

“Etiquette class is called. Miss Patience Sheridan, rise and bow.”

Miss Patience Sheridan rose and bowed. Then she wound one foot about an ankle and twisted her handkerchief and rolled her eyes at her companions, intimating that, for gentility’s sake, she was now about to be skinned and quartered.

“Miss Patience Sheridan, if a young man called upon you where would you tell him good night?”

“I would not go beyond the parlor door with him,” recited Patience glibly.

Melody Merrill bit her lip. Well did she know that her friend would take to a rowboat with him if need be. But she also remembered that Miss Patience had had company in the rowboat, so she silently and wisely adjusted her hair riband.

"And why would you not go farther, Miss Patience?" Mrs. Farragut pursued.

"It would be in extremely bad taste and would, perhaps, cause scandal," recited Patience.

"Miss Maryann Bolger, rise and bow." Maryann made an elaborate bow and she, too, cast round her eyes for succor.

"Miss Merrill, you may take Miss Bolger and continue with the lesson, page 31, question 2," said Mrs. Farragut. "I want to stir up a little corn pone for Ebenezer's dinner. I'll be right back," and she left the class in Melody's hands. Melody looked at the questions.

"Miss Bolger," she inquired, "if you were walking in the country with a gentleman and grew tired and sat down upon the ground would you request your escort also to be seated?"

"Oh, no!" declared Miss Bolger. "A really delicate lady does not request her escort to be seated beside her."

"Why does she not, Miss Bolger?" Melody inquired.

"Well I — I forget — Maybe because her knees would be sticking up?" guessed Maryann, hopefully.

Miranda Ellsworth's hand was waving furiously. "She would not sit upon the ground before him, herself," she declared.

"Yes, yes, that would be permissible," conceded Mrs. Farragut as she returned to the class. "I know that used to be improper, but old, rigid rules like that are fast being pushed aside for freedom for women. And mighty right that is! And in this day and age she may sit upon the ground at her ease so long as her escort remains standing above her. But as for the two of them sitting down together, that is simply not done, and I trust you will all bear it in mind, now and always, and under all circumstances."

She motioned for Melody to proceed with the recitation.

"What should a lady do in case an ill bred male lights a cigar

in her presence?" asked Melody. "Bethinda Hollis, rise and bow."

"Oh —" said Bethinda. "Well, she should stare at him coldly. And if he does not immediately extinguish it and beg her pardon she should throw up her head and place her handkerchief to her face in pained surprise. If this does not cause him to cease smoking, instantly, and apologize profusely, she should turn sharply upon her heel and walk away."

"Excellent recitation!" commended Mrs. Farragut.

"Give them bows, Melody. Let us see how they are on bows," she said, and handed Melody a new set of notes.

"Miss Jane Ellen Bowden, rise and bow." But at Miss Jane Ellen's nonchalant flounder out of her chair, Mrs. Farragut was displeased. Miss Jane Ellen repeated, and correctly.

"Miss Jane Ellen, will you recite on bows?" asked Melody.

"It is best to let the length — I mean the width — well, the strength of your bow be adjusted according to whom you're bowing. I mean if you don't like the person much, just tilt your head ever so little. And if you like him — her, a lot, just bend your neck as much as ever you can. If you never want to see the person again in all your life long, just jerk your head, haughtily, and look away."

"Yes," said Mrs. Farragut, "and another important thing, never, never call young men by their first names. You must remember, my dear young ladies, that when you show familiarity — you also invite it!"

The entire class of young ladies looked more than duly impressed; they looked serious.

"What about handshaking?" coached Mrs. Farragut.

"If you walk in the street and meet a gentleman, do not offer your hand until he offers his own first. And if you walk in the

street with one friend and meet another, you do not introduce them unless each has requested it," recited Bettina Mason glibly. Bettina could always remember the questions that had, in any way, to do with young men.

"Melinda Hosper, rise and bow." Mrs. Farragut came back from another look at the corn pone and took charge.

"Miss Hosper, what can you say of furniture arrangement when a gentleman calls?"

Melinda looked scared and focused her eyes, at last, on Bethinda Hollis who was trying to tell her something by wrenching at her chairback.

"Oh — oh, well — Why, it is not in good taste to have the chairs too close together when a gentleman calls."

"Exactly right," commended Mrs. Farragut. "Miss Patience Sheridan, rise and bow. What marks a lady as having good table manners, Miss Sheridan?"

"Well — some things — why, she should never put a knife in her mouth when it is at all possible not to. And she should not grasp her cup when she pours tea into her saucer, but hold it daintilylike, with her little finger crooked. If she eats cherries or such she should not blow the stones but should take them from her mouth in her hand, slylike." *

Cups and saucers and crooked little fingers, Melody was thinking under all this. It would be much more important that the little fingers of her Brier's Nesters were warm. And that their dinner buckets were left near the stove where their food would not be frozen at noon; let them get it into their small, hungry gullets with crooked fingers or not, as they saw fit.

And what did she care what young men lit cigars in what outraged, young ladies' faces when other young men were virtuous?

* From *Ladies Book of Etiquette* by Hartley.

ally heaving certain young ladies out of their schoolhouses and sitting in their calico-chairs, themselves? And when other, older men were mounting up on old farm horses that would have doubtless preferred to be at the plow, and were riding round-about the country telling all and sundry that they were all God's children and that He cared for them, when these same old men had left five uncared-for children of their own, at home?

Oh, this charm business was very fine; it had its place. But it was not enough for Melody Merrill. Charm, she thought, should be of the heart more than of the head and the fine bonnet that perched upon it, just at the right angle. Yes, though nobody loved little, tight-boned basques and cluster-curls more than Melody, still, she loved the old cowhide boots of Abner and the tight, red little braids of Jody Mullins more. But Abner and Jody and all of them, now, they were under the fine and competent guidance of this brought-on Phillip Walton and needing her not at all, perhaps. It was she who needed them. Tears stung Melody's eyes and she looked hard at the question list, but Mrs. Farragut was taking it.

"And now," she said, "we have our last question of the day. Miss Maryann Bolger, rise and bow.

"Miss Bolger, we will say a gentleman has been introduced to you at a party and you have even danced with him. You meet him on the street. The next day, perhaps. Is it necessary that you renew the acquaintance?"

Miss Bolger flounced up her ruffles where she had been sitting on them and she smiled round at the Charm Class. Not always was she wrong. Today she had her lesson.

"It is strictly etiquette to cut even a nobleman to the marrow!" she stated triumphantly — she stated beamingly.

But Mrs. Farragut raised eyebrows. She raised chin. She

dropped the foolscap sheet with its questions upon the marble-topped table. And she raised her two pretty hands.

"Your head, Miss Bolger, is full of emptiness! The answer: it is strictly etiquette to cut a nobleman on the morrow — not to the marrow! Class dismissed. Find your own way out, young ladies, and mind you don't kick up the hall rugs. I see Ebenezer coming there, cross-lots, for his buttermilk and corn pone."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MILLSPAUGH PULLS IN HIS HORNS

WHEN THE daguerreotypes came the Charm School was all a dither, and so was all of Concord, for that matter. The likenesses were passed around all through the village, at gatherings and such. It was fine advertising for her school, Mrs. Farragut thought complacently. It showed that it was up and coming and right abreast with the outside world's goings on.

Melody continued to help Mrs. Farragut with her class of Charm but her heart was not in it. Her heart was in Brier's Nest. Not because Phillip Walton was there, but because Jody Mullins and Sylvester Millspaugh and the others were, she told herself, but not with much conviction. However, she did make two or three trips to the stump post office and it sometimes almost slipped her mind to read one of the letters from Louisa Alcott, when she found it there. An all-gone feeling possessed her when she saw only Louisa's handwriting. Not that she would ever read another of Phillip Walton's letters even if she did find one! Indeed she never would!

Louisa Alcott had dropped all plans for the spring party at her house when Melody no longer taught at Brier's Nest, of course,

and simply nothing was heard from the school or Phillip Walton or Brother Millspaugh for weeks.

Until one day in early April. The swelling buds were beginning to burst and the grass was turning green, sooner than it had in years in Massachusetts. Some of the old settlers said that was because of the bad winter and the melting of vast snowdrifts that had covered the land. Melody had lined off the next lesson, dismissed the Charm School class and put on her new ocean-blue pelisse that Ebenezer Farragut had brought from Boston. No matter how independent she tried to be, Father and Mother still insisted on buying her clothes. It made a body feel childish. And still, pretty clothes were nice to have — and expensive. She tipped the little, rose-plumed hat over one eye, this too, Ebenezer had brought from Boston, and she set out toward home for dinner.

Bethinda Hollis came out of the door immediately after her wearing a grass-green pelrine and a pistachio-colored bonnet. They were, in style, the exact replica of those worn by Melody. Maryann Bolger sprang down the front steps like a hoyden — pray the Lord that Mrs. Farragut was not watching from behind the curtains. Maryann's rose-colored pelrine and wallflower bonnet repeated exactly in style, those of Bethinda and Melody. Ebenezer took advantage of his wife's customers in making them customers of his own. For who could say, "I thought of something else," or, "We planned to go trading in Boston," when Ebenezer pushed his stock upon one? Mrs. Farragut would perhaps, next day, be giving a stern lesson in courtesy to tradespeople. And who was poor Eb, to have a different style in stock for everybody?

As Melody started up the long gravel walk to her father's house her eyes all but started from her head. If there didn't stand old Millspaugh's nag at the hitching post! He stamped about im-

patiently and whiffled wind through his nose as if he had been tied there a long time. Well, if the old — whatever he was — had come for Nathan to pray with him again, Nath were better employed grubbing stumps out of the west acre.

But when she entered the house she found that Nathan was not there and that Brother Millspaugh was having a bite or two of hot marvels fresh from her mother's frying kettle, and a mug of buttermilk or two, at the kitchen table. And he was pouring his heart out to her mother about something.

"Oh, Brother Millspaugh! How are the children? Is little Sylvester all right?" Melody's heart leaped for the news of them and in that moment her disdain for their father was forgotten.

"Now that's just what brought me home from my circuit riding, busy as I was in the Lord's important work, and it is what brought me here to see you, Miss Melody. Now, I'm in a peck of trouble trying to tend to both. Of course, I keep ever in mind that His business comes first. But, fact is, things ain't so good in Brier's Nest. Well — to come right down to the point and make a long story short, what's happened but that Mr. Phillip Walton, that no-count scalawag — my cloth forbids me sterner terms, Miss Melody — that Philip Walton, well, he has pulled up and took his self another school somewheres. Out Dry Branch way, they say. Funniest thing you ever seen, too. He wouldn't take a cent of pay for the weeks he was at Brier's Nest. He said it was yours by right, but of course it ain't. Then, again, he said Abner and Joseph could have it for shoes but I don't see nothing wrong with the shoes they have.

"Well, anyways, that leaves Brier's Nest with no schoolteacher and it leaves nobody except the two boys, no responsible grownup, to stay there in the house nights with the little ones, me being out on my mission, on the Lord's mission, I should say.

The house, it's kind of out a ways, too, no right close neighbors. Them boys is big but they ain't old.

"So that's why I took off time and come down here to you. I tell you, Miss Melody, I'm just at rope's end!" (Would that he were, thought Melody.) "Yes sir, I'm that worried about my little fambly. So now, Miss Melody, why don't you be guided by the Lord's own hand and marry me and help with the raising of my little brood? I'm making my proposal of marriage open and aboveboard. I've just been telling your Ma, here, what my plans were. Now if you could see your way clear to do that it would fix things up in every direction. You could give a hand with the fambly, seeing that you're so fond of them all and at the same time you could take back Brier's Nest school. Anyways, Miss Melody, you're signed up by the Board for four months' teaching and you've only done round six or seven weeks. You've time to put on yet if you was held to contract." A note of belligerence crept into his voice.

"The contract, Mr. Millspaugh, was broken by the Board, not by me. And I am obligated in no way either to you or the collective Board. As far as marriage is concerned--- I would have to have time to consider. But I will go back to Brier's Nest and take the school again."

With her own unpremeditated words Melody's voice ran up in a rhythmical lilt of happiness. She felt tears stinging her eyelids and she ran up the backstairs to her own chamber. The while came Millspaugh's voice in a relieved boom of satisfaction and confidence that everything would turn out all right. The Lord had a way of His own of doing all for the best.

"And good morning now, Mrs. Merrill. No telling how soon I'll be calling you 'Mother,' if me and Miss Melody can just see eye to eye."

"Mother indeed!" Melody laughed through her tears as she again came down the stairs when Millspaugh had slammed the door behind him. "He is, anyway, ten years older than you are, darling."

OH, the first day back at Brier's Nest school was lovely! The weather was mild and the windows could be opened and the branches of the surrounding dogwood trees pushed in to show Melody and the children just a bit of leaf here and there. Proud, they seemed.

The children's voices were as sweet as the voices of the robins outside the windows. Most of them wore their best frocks and frilled aprons and their clean shirts and breeches. But the Millspaughs seemed not so well cared for. They were, today, as the Millspaughs who had first sat in the seats before her. A little disheveled. Not quite clean. And not quite happy, except that she was back. Two of them were absent. The seats of both Joseph and Abner remained vacant.

The school sang *Flowers, Wildwood Flowers* and then Melody told them about her trip to the city and what a wonderful thing this new daguerreotype was and who invented it. And she passed the daguerreotypes of both herself and Patience about and allowed each one to hold them in his hand and look at them as long as he liked.

"You ain't got the curl-cluster on in it, Miss Melody!" complained Jody Mullins, half in tears.

And they told her how Mr. Phillip, too, had allowed them to sing in the mornings. And how he had allowed them all to talk as much as they liked, the last half hour in class, about anything that they wanted to. But just one at a time, of course. And they

had nearly always talked about Miss Melody herself, said Jody. Mr. Phillip thought nearly everything that they thought.

They read again from McGuffey's Reader of Patty who fell down the stairs and hurt her ankle and decently covered it with her gown. They read the story of the boy who stole apples, from the old Blue-Backed Speller. And the lilt in Sarah Millspaugh's voice implied that it was a fine and jolly thing, indeed, to steal apples. Then they sang again, and Melody suggested that Georgie Hancock spell "geography," by using the first letters of "George Eliot's Old Grandmother Rode A Pig Home Yesterday," and everybody laughed as much as he could. And then they sang some more. It was such a fine April day! And only the dogwoods and possibly, the robins, knew that there was more laughter than knowledge in the air.

When Melody went home with the Millspaughs that night, Joseph and Abner were in the kitchen with a roaring fire. They were frying meat in the big iron spider and trying to get a company supper. The unironed tablecloth was clean and the bouquet of spoons in the red-glass holder stood exactly in the middle, while the plates were carefully turned upside down, and spoons and knives and forks flanked them neatly.

The boy's faces shone not only with soapsuds and the heat from the skillet but with gladness at her return, she knew. She went up to her own chamber. It seemed really her own, now, and laid her books upon the bureau. She took off the rose-plumed hat and smoothed her dark hair. Sarah came in bringing a pitcher of warm water for the washbowl and she let Sarah try on the hat. And Joseph came, bringing her carpetbag, and he had a good laugh at Sarah. Melody liked to hear that laugh. Then she went downstairs and made the gravy and washed young Sylvester's

face and hands, and told the boys what a fine supper they had prepared, and they all sat down to eat. It was then that she missed something.

"Why — why where is Gramma Millspaugh?" she exclaimed. "I just now missed her. She isn't ill, is she?" Melody half rose to go to Gramma's room, but Sarah said, "Oh, Gramma — Uncle Bart from over Glenbrook way came and took her home with him, Pa gone all the time like he is on his mission."

Melody again sat down and took the dish of fried potatoes from Joseph's hand. So the children actually had been alone, away out here. Gramma, to be sure, had not been able to do anything for them but her presence lent a certain air of safety. And it had, too, lent an air of propriety when she, herself, had been here in the house with the children and their father. Now when he came back from a mission she certainly could not stay — unless she married him.

"I'm glad you came back, Miss Melody," piped Sylvester, at this point in her musing. "Joe, he don't know how to make gravy. And Sarah don't wash my ears easy like you do."

Well, she had had uneasy thoughts not so long ago about being an old maid and here, in quicker time than it took to tell it, she seemed just being pushed into marriage, while she was half in love with another. She was all in love, she didn't care how unlady-like it was, with a man she probably never would see again in all her life. At least she hoped she never would. She most sincerely hoped it! A man who hopped across country from one place to another. One that had never in his life shown her any mind except maybe to carry her across a stream and write the one word *Darling* and stick it in an old stump. Maybe a body would be better off to marry a man who had children and missions: she to take care of the children while he took care of the missions and

kept himself a million miles away — she hoped. It was hard for a body to decide. Would Joseph put down that platter of ham meat and would Sarah eat that last biscuit instead of urging it upon her, time after time? And would small Sylvester sit up in his chair and finish his supper and stop dimpling at her? She just wished she were not such a soft-hearted piece who took other folks' troubles for her own. But such small, pathetic folks, she thought, as Sarah triumphantly laid that last biscuit upon teacher's plate.

"I missed you two boys at school. Abner, aren't you attending regularly? There are only about six weeks left, you know," she said.

"Well, you see, Miss McI — Well, Pa being gone roundabout on his preaching, he says me and Joe will have to put in the crop — just garden sass, mostly. And a few potatoes in the lower field. You see, Pa never liked farming much and now he's a preacher he don't like it at all. So he says he will rent most of this place out to Sol Mayberry and the ten acres on the other side of the road to Amos Longstreet."

"He says that's money in his old hip pocket," explained Sylvester, and he laughed at her over his mug of milk.

"It is, indeed!" Melody agreed as she wiped his chin. "But you boys can't be expected to handle even that small a portion of the farm alone."

"We could!" bragged Abner. "We could, Miss Melody, me and Joe together, if we just had somebody to kind of oversee. Me, I like farming and Joe does too, but with everything hither and yon around here since Pa quit putting in the crops — well, a feller hardly knows where to start at — I mean where to start."

"Yes," said Melody, "and you little girls trying to run the house yourselves. Why, you need somebody here all the time."

"You're here," said Milly simply, as if the words rested her.

"Yes—I am now—but I may not always be. I mean, you know I have only about six weeks of teaching, or maybe eight if I want to stretch it out and then—"

Every pair of eyes about the table held her face. Melody knew that they had heard the plans their father had made. She knew they all longed to hear her say that she would stay with them always. Could she?

She must have more time to think.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A DOCTOR IN THE NIGHT

M ELODY HAD scarcely fallen asleep, or so it seemed, when she was suddenly awakened by Sylvester's whimpering. He shared Sarah's bed across the hall, and when Sarah slept she slept soundly. Usually Sylvester, too, slept like a little log. Melody was frightened. She put on her wrapper and slippers.

She made her way to the bed and, in the darkness, laid her hand upon his head. His face was hot and his breathing heavy. When she lit the lamp and looked at him she saw that he was flushed, and he tossed about as if uncomfortable and in pain. Sarah leaned upon her elbow and blinked.

"What is it, Miss Melody? What's the matter?" she asked.

"Sarah, call Joseph. Sylvester must be ill. See how flushed he is, and he was whimpering."

Sarah called, and Joseph, long-legged and with hair awry and sleep still in his eyes, came hurrying into the room.

"Excuse me, Miss Melody, I couldn't find my shoes. Is something wrong? What is it?"

Now Sylvester opened his eyes but promptly closed them and still whimpered and tossed. He clutched at his stomach and, still

tossing and with eyes closed, said, "It hurts! Right here, Miss Mel! It just hurts like cats a fightin'!"

"Joseph, it may be nothing, but we can't take the chance," said Melody. "I never saw him this way before. Nath's boy was ill with his stomach last summer, and the doctor said if we hadn't gotten him there when we did, it might have been too late. Now don't be frightened, though. It may be nothing. But you get on a horse and ride to Concord as quickly as ever you can and get him here. Doctor Isaac Hoffer, there at the corner. You know where his office is. Better go to his house across the street first, though, he must be in bed. But he will come. And you, Sarah, stir up the fire and put the kettle on. Likely we'll need hot water. When it gets warm in the parlor I will bring him down, if the doctor is not here yet."

Melody had just carried the fretting little boy down in her arms and she was laying him on the couch, where Abner had the comforts and blankets and pillows arranged, when Doctor Hoffer entered. He was a little, swarthy man with thin, weather-beaten cheeks folded inward, and keen eyes that seemed to see everything in one look. He must have been seventy years old, at least. He warmed his hands well at the stove and looked at the sick child steadily, saying nothing.

Now he examined Sylvester, pressing upon his small, distended abdomen and pulling up his eyelids and feeling his pulse. Then he ordered hot water and Abner and Joseph brought a steaming tubful right into the parlor. Joe kept up the fire and everyone looked on helplessly, for by now everyone was aroused.

All of the children, the doctor said, must go back to bed or into the kitchen. He would need only Melody and perhaps Joseph, to help him. The others could keep the kitchen fire up and make

some coffee for him to drink before he started home again, in case they felt they must do something. Everybody started importantly to the kitchen. The doctor's manner reassured them. And was not Miss Melody here?

"Well, Melody Merrill, I heard you were teaching school up here at Brier's Nest, but I didn't know you had a family," said Doctor Hoffer. He stripped Sylvester and prepared to immerse his lower body in the tub of warm water.

"Somebody has to have families." Melody could smile now with relief, since she had help. "I guess I have stayed here more than in any of my other scholars' homes because — well, they seem to need a woman so. Do you think little Ves will be all right, Doctor?"

"It looks like they need a father, too, if I hear things straight," declared the doctor gruffly. "Seems a pity. Nice bunch of children if I'm any judge. I knew their mother when she was their size. From as fine stock as was ever in this part of the country, Candace Barrows. Is it a fact, now, that their father claims he has the call and goes about the country circuit riding? — There, that's better. He is getting easier. Swelling going down, some. A mighty good thing you called me; it could have been dangerous. Now you wrap him up and keep him warm and give him these pellets, one every two hours and I think he will come through fine. But there certainly ought to be somebody in charge around here, with a family of young tykes like this."

"I — I guess I'm in charge, Doctor. I'm so glad you think Sylvester will be all right. Now you go in the kitchen and have some coffee. And will you tell the children he's better? They're so scared."

The doctor brought his big coffee cup and the boiler, itself,

back into the parlor with him. He sat in an armchair and talked as he sipped. And the children slipped in from the kitchen.

"Well, Doc — I mean, Doctor Hoffer, it was sure good of you to get up in the middle of the night and come all this way," said Joseph. Melody could see that he was awkward and embarrassed but felt that, as the eldest, he should thank the doctor.

"Yes! I think we should all have died of fright if nothing else if you had not come," Melody seconded Joseph.

The doctor poured himself more coffee, and then he said, "Well — getting up in the middle of the night is just part of a doctor's work. Oh — we've had it hard in the past, maybe, but things are picking up for us right smart. Soon all we shall do is sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam. Science, you know — What's that, young fellow? Are you perking up a bit?"

Sylvester opened his eyes and seemed to be feeling much better. He stared round at them all and then snuggled into Melody's comforting arms at the head of the couch. Sylvester had seldom been held in a woman's arms, too seldom for a six-year-old. Now to see the little, pleasant-faced doctor here in the middle of the night, all of the other children standing around, Melody nursing him, and everybody happy about something, made him happy too. And he wanly brought out the dimple.

The doctor, it seemed, was going to stay a while and talk. They liked to hear him, and they eased down on the end of the couch and upon the floor. And before they knew it they were having things to say, too, and asking questions. And Doctor Hoffer answered every one of them.

He told stories about such folks as old Alexis St. Martin,* who, some twenty-five years before, had been loafing round and gotten himself shot in the stomach. The skin hanging down made a

* *Immortals of Medicine* — Paul De Kruif

door. And how a Doctor William Beaumont had used that door to study the inside workings of a stomach and from his experience had discovered certain scientific facts. "And because of old Alexis, Master Sylvester Millspaugh, I knew that you ought to have those little pepsin tablets every two hours."

He told them of how Doctor William Morton of Boston was at the very moment working with something he called letheon, that he claimed would stop pain from even pulling a tooth or an amputation of a limb.

"Fine coffee, Abner! Did you make it?" the doctor paused to say.

"Gee, Doctor," stammered Joseph, bashfully, "that's a wonderful thing, to be a doctor, I mean."

"Yes, medicine is wonderful," declared the doctor, "and it's taking strides right now, in this day and age, that people never would have believed possible, even ten years ago. Now just last year, all this new stuff on microbes. They're little things that spread disease from one person to another. They're deadly, though they're so little you can't even see them."

"I've seen them," stated Sylvester drowsily, "in the woodshed."

"Who discovered microbes, Doctor?" asked Joseph.

"Semmelweiss in Vienna. He's young, too, only twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. They say he insists that everyone who works in any way on one of his cases must wash his hands first. And he keeps a basin of chlorine water just outside the ward for the nurses and doctors to use and thus rid themselves of these microbes.

"Well, that boy is asleep and so is this one. I must be toddling home. Now you youngsters hop into bed, and I will carry him upstairs for you, Melody. It will be dawn before you know it. And I hope my stories don't keep you all awake. If they do, just get

Joseph or Abner out after me and I'll come back and tell you some more. Do you two boys think you can take care of him all right tomorrow while Melody is in school?"

"My, HE was nice wasn't he, Miss Mel? Drinking the coffee and all," Sarah said with a yawn after the children were in bed. "He was just like a friend visiting. And didn't he stay long!"

"He could see we were by ourselves! He didn't want to leave us alone away out here in the country, in the night, and Sylvester sick!" Joe answered from the lower bedroom. "Sometimes, after things like this — I just don't care if Pa ever does come home or not! I just hope he stays away forever!"

There was a half sob in the growing boy's voice and the last, muffled words told Melody that a quilt had been thrown over his head.

"Yes, Sarah, he was nice," Melody agreed as she folded the small Sylvester cozily into her own bed, "and he was a friend. All doctors are."

"Where are you going, Miss Melody?" asked Sarah, as Melody took up the lamp.

"I am going into the parlor to write a letter. I am going to write a letter to your father." Melody held high the lamp and walked out of the room as if in triumph.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE PLAY'S THE THING

THE SPRING breezes were blowing over Walden Pond and Walden Wood, and all the country roundabout was sending out leaves and shoots, and even a few varicolored flowers of fragrance and beauty. There were the white blossoms of the dogwood looking as if they had been scissored out of white paper. And there were the anemone and the dog-toothed violet, the sweet fern, Solomon's seal and checkerberry. The foxberry or eye-bright, with its dainty and delicate white blooms, abounded, and later it would boldly contribute bright red berries for the fall pageant.

The Alcott girls were busily preparing for their play for the Brier's Nest school, children and parents and any of Concord that would come.

The party and play was being held on a Saturday night, and early in the afternoon the wagons and buggies and carryalls began drawing into the Alcotts' yard. Baskets of good country food were lifted from wagonbeds and backs of carriages and piled upon a table in the front yard. After the bounteous supper the Alcott girls would present their favorite original play, *The Old Woman and the Pedlar*.

In preparation, Anna and Elizabeth and Louisa and Abby May, with half a dozen helpers, were racing back and forth from house to barn, where rehearsals still went on; up to the attic for costumes and wigs and shawls and this and that, each in a dither of busyness and excitement. The attic was practically full of old gowns and hats and mantles and things they had saved to use in their plays, because they loved to act and gave these plays whether there was or was not an audience. Sometimes they, themselves, doubled as audience.

Wandering about the yard and grounds, Bronson Alcott soon set the crowd at ease. He was a fine fellow, was the unanimous opinion.

Toward the middle of the afternoon the Concorders began arriving. Mrs. Thoreau's son Henry came with her and he carried a large and well-filled basket. A little later there were the Emersons, Ralph and Lydian, with their children. Then came the Plummers and the Sheridans, of course, and, it seemed, half the town.

Now the supper was being laid upon the table in the yard. Mrs. Farragut had found time between classes of introductions and bows and gentle downcastings of eyes, or even while such classes were in progress, to fill her big basket with taste-teasing provencher. She laid out crusty crullers and fried young chickens, early as it was, and glasses of jelly sparkling in the afternoon sun, for the young and appreciative Brier's Nesters.

Nathan Merrill's wife, Rosanna, laid out one snowy iced cake after the other. Rosanna had always loved to cook, as well as some loved eating the food after she had cooked it.

And the Brier's Nesters' mothers were not outdone in the culinary art, by any manner of means, though some, perhaps, had to save back a little of this or a little of that for the picnic basket.

As they set their contributions out alongside those of the best of Concord, Concord loudly and enthusiastically praised and begged recipes.

Immediately after the supper, tables were cleared and planks were placed upon chairs all down the big front yard, facing the wide veranda of the house. Folks took their places and a murmur of anticipation and happy excitement filled the air. A show was a show, whether home talent or brought in. Brought-in ones were scarce; some had never even seen a real play.

Now came Bronson and Henry Thoreau and Jed Mullins with all the lights in the house, and they placed them upon the veranda wall-shelf and the window sills and wherever they could stand one, just in case the play ran on, as some did, and dark fell before it was over. You never could tell about that jolly Louisa Alcott. If she happened to think of something good she put it extemporaneously into her speech.

The veranda was to be the stage. It would be entered by the actors and actresses from the middle front door. Their exits would be made by the side doors. Louisa, now in trailing gown and high, plumed hat; now in lowly shawl with basket upon her arm; now just Lou, in her brown-print frock, dashed out from rehearsing to give directions as to stage setting.

"Where did you put that umbrella, Abby?"

"Here — help me with my makeup, Patience — "

"Look out or you'll get your foot caught in it and go sprawling down the front steps into the lap of your audience!" The voices could be plainly heard through the open windows, but that did not lessen the suspense of waiting for the impending drama.

The program called first for the play. Tableaus would follow. And after them the audience would be called upon to furnish any bit of entertainment that it could. Surely many of the Concorders

and Brier's Nesters were talented, declared Louisa, for the moment stage manager in the brown-print dress and a high silk hat.

Immediately upon this announcement Georgie Hancock's mother began drilling him in the recitation from McGuffey's *Eclectic Primer*: "*Work while you work and play while you play. One thing at a time and that done well, is a very good rule as any can tell — No, honey — many can tell —*" In loud and sepulchral whispers that carried across the entire yard.

But why were those seats there in the front being held empty? A body could see lots better from them. Immediately came the answer, and a lovely one it was. Mrs. Farragut, in very best bib and tucker, frothing laces, swaying plumes and floating veil, an ensemble which she had substituted for the gray alpaca and large white apron of the supper setting, led her procession of Concord's Select Charm School down to the seats that had been reserved for them.

As each found her place she made a decorous bow to family and friends and dropped upon her plank seat with a fragile grace that must fair break one's heart. Yes, every lip was primmed, and every little finger was at the correct angle. Looks were cast down when they should be cast down, and lifted in proper gentility at exactly the right time. They were an excellent advertisement for Mrs. Farragut's instruction. She expected at least half a dozen new pupils because of them.

In contrast to these gently nurtured buds came young Louisa Alcott to announce the play: *The Old Woman and the Pedlar*. Lou ducked back into the middle door and out again, more quickly than it takes to tell it, the pedlar himself. Elizabeth Sewell Alcott was the old lady. Not a word was forgotten nor a tone overplayed. They had done it often.

But at the very climax, at the most dramatic moment, while the

old woman and the pedlar paused, ready for their most effective lines, the lines that were to bring the house down — or at least the plank seats — lines that all of Concord if not Brier's Nesters knew, to be sure, but that were awaited with tense anticipation, nevertheless — one of the many doors onto the veranda opened and Bronson Alcott strolled into the very act itself. But nobody seemed put out about it. The crowd clapped and even the actors, themselves, had to give the moment over to him, in laughter. Bronson was fun, everyone agreed.

Melody Merrill sat among her Brier's Nest youngsters and looked at them proudly. She decided that if they were called upon they should perform in a body and sing *Flowers, Wild-wood Flowers*; they loved it so. Yes, just the fact that children had, not so long ago, been forbidden to sing in school seemed to give them greater pleasure. That, and the fact that Brother Mills-paugh did not like for them to sing, Melody thought grimly and with just a little satisfaction.

But now Mr. Ralph Emerson was on his feet, saying that they all owed a vote of thanks to the women of both Brier's Nest and Concord for a fine supper. And they also owed thanks to Miss Louisa Alcott for such fine entertainment. Those words would be sweet to Louisa, Melody knew, because as Louisa had confided to her she adored Mr. Emerson. She went to him for advice about her reading and such matters instead of to her father. She loved her father, of course, she had said, but Mr. Emerson was different.

"Did you say a vote of spanks?" boomed Bronson. "You are right! They are due my daughter for plenty. Sitting up in a cherry tree in the middle of the night, screeching, for example! She was up there not so long ago, singing to the moon, she said. The hoot owls scared her down!"

He was laughing and everybody was laughing with him, but

quickly Louisa came back in repartee: "It is no wonder that I do such romantic things! I am the daughter of a man who courted his wife, my mother, for three years. Well, that isn't such a very long courtship, of course. But every calling night, mind you, he read to her from a volume called *Instruction for the Early Management of Children with a View to Their Future Character.*"

Now the crowd was in a gale of merriment and even Mrs. Alcott was laughing at her clever husband and their daughter.

"Talent! Talent!" cried Louisa, again in costume, high, plumed hat and magnificent flowing train. Melody Merrill cried out that Louisa, herself, should sing *Wild Roved an Indian Maid, Sweet Alfarata*. Louisa sang it in most dramatic fashion. Then she took her master-of-ceremonies status again. Who would perform?

Henry Thoreau, who was sitting well toward the back, rose and rather shyly addressed her. He said that of course he could not perform in any way at all, but he wished to renew the invitation to Brier's Nest school he had given there last winter. If they would all come to Walden Pond and spend the last day of school he would show them his friends, the birds and the bees, and many another as small or smaller than they.

Louisa motioned to Melody and she rose from her seat. "That is the young man who sent you the lead pencils for Christmas, children," she told the Brier's Nesters. "Clap your hands to thank him for both the pencils and the invitation and to tell him that you will be happy to come."

Brier's Nest clapped till its small palms were red. He looked like a nice person to all of them, as he always did to the small and the shy, and the mice and the squirrels and the birds in Walden. And besides, an invitation was an invitation. They did not go about much.

"And now! May we hear from our modern schoolmistress, Miss Melody Merrill!" Louisa called.

Melody rose and ushered her clan up the steps and onto the veranda, telling them one by one, as they passed her, that they were to sing *Flowers*, *Wildwood Flowers*, and that she would stand up with them. "I don't feel one bit frightened and I don't think they are either," she was saying to herself proudly, when — she saw him! That Phillip Walton!

He was coming across the grassy yard toward her. His waist-coat was resplendent but his face was just as bright. He stopped beside her and would have spoken but Melody spoke first: "Perhaps I am not within my right; is it your class or mine?" Her words were low but they were scathing, and with them she flounced up the steps after her charges. But as she and the children lifted up their voices about wildwood flowers she could not help looking for one moment at this bold Phillip — this usurper who — who — She looked as quickly away, for his face no longer shone. His face looked as if she had hurt him deeply.

After the song, Melody ushered her charges back to their seats amid a burst of applause and when she reached her own seat she found that Phillip stood near it.

"Miss Melody — Mel!" he said to her softly. "Please let me have a word with you. See, the crowd is breaking up. Let me walk with you to the gate. Let me tell you why — "

Melody turned like a flash upon him but the words she meant to say remained unsaid.

Then the front gate clicked.

"Well, well, Miss Melody! I knowed the minute your letter caught up with me that you had changed your mind and I just dropped everything, hammer and tongs, and rode off home, posthaste, to hear the good news from your own lips. Though I

did have four seeking souls right at the bench when I done it! I couldn't wait home when I found you not there, I had to get myself on down here to hear it from your own lips. I want to hear you say it, Miss Melody — though Melly is going to be my name for you from now on and — ”

“I will say it then if you want me to, Mr. Millspaugh! I will say it!” Melody flashed upon him, indignantly. “I wrote you to come home so I could tell you that I have accepted your offer to look after your family. I think that is what I told you in my letter. And I have looked after them. I have placed the two older boys with my brother, Nathan, where they have a real farm to work on and a fine farmer to work with. They love farming when it is farming, and they love him, and all of us. And we all love them.

“And your two girls — they have been on the farm with my mother for this past week. She reared a parcel of girls and she understands them. They are happy there with her and she is happy to have them. And, Mr. Millspaugh, between us all we expect to give those children a home and educate them. They are good, bright children.

“Doctor Hoffer advised me and he helped me do it and he said that I might tell you so. He said to tell you that if you raise one single objection you will be arrested for forsaking them. For neglecting them. And how will your seeking sinners like that?

“As for little Sylvester — he was dangerously ill. And where were you, his father? You're not a father; you're an unlicensed circuit rider! Popping up along the country roads here and there, like a mushroom over night, and leaving your family duties!”

“Now, Miss Melody, I can't blame you a mite. And it would have been a big family to manage for one as young as you.”

“I've been managing it all winter!” Melody cried in fury. “And

I still intend to keep a hand in at managing it—Nath and Mother and Doc Hoffer and I!"

"Yes, yes, Miss Melody. You done right. And I sure appreciate your taking a hand like this with me so busy in the vineyard, and all. And just with the little boy it will be handier all around, us getting married — But what must this Walton stand around for, taking in every word? Come, get in my carryall and we'll plan while we ride out from the crowd a little piece."

"Mr. Walton is taking me home — to my father's. Sarah and Milly asked that I bring Sylvester home to spend the night with them. Come on, Sylvester."

Old Millspaugh looked baffled. And Phillip Walton was, to say the least, astonished at the turn of events. That was not what Melody had turned so sharply upon him to say just before Millspaugh's arrival; of that he was positive. He walked to the buggy and lifted small Sylvester into the front seat. The child looked happy.

And he thought that Miss Melody Merrill did too.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A DAY AT WALDEN WOOD

ON THAT fine May morning, their last day of school for the year, the Brier's Nest school children, with well-packed dinner buckets and baskets, set out for Walden Wood to spend the day with Henry Thoreau, as he had invited them.

Yes, until late in May, Melody had held her school, most of her scholars being so small they were of little use on a farm, and the general shifting of teachers and the bad weather making it hard to determine just how much time she owed the school and how much salary it owed her. And Melody was glad of this. She was in no hurry to say good-bye to the Brier's Nesters — Jody Mullins, Drusy Owens, Harriet Buford, and the rest. Because, she sometimes thought, she loved them as if they were her own small brothers and sisters. Of course, these latter days she was staying at home and Nath was driving her and the Millspaugh girls and Sylvester in to the school each morning. At least she would not have to give up her Millspaughs.

Patience Sheridan had skipped Charm School today in order to bear Melody company, and the two girls now walked up the dirt road together, after the bevy of shouting children.

"You see, Patience, there was nothing else I could do but just

seize the opportunity of having Phillip take me home from the Alcotts' the other night, in order to get rid of that old Millspaugh. I think Phil — Mr. Walton understood, though. I do hope he doesn't think me gay. I just had to do something, and quickly."

"Of course you had to seize the bull by the horns," Patience agreed inelegantly. "But what did Phillip say when you reached home? Or on the way? Did he say — anything — important? I mean — you know."

"Well, not that you could exactly call important. Except he said that, well, that I would hear more from him. He said there was something he wanted to tell me, but he couldn't right then. He said Duty would not let him speak."

"Melody Merrill, when a man begins to talk to a young lady about duty he is either joining the militia or marrying some other girl twice as pretty as she is! If I were you I would be mighty careful what truck I had with such a mysterious young man! My mother always says —"

"So does mine!" Melody agreed tartly. "But neither of us ever listens to them, though we should. Anyway the chances are I'll never see this Phillip Walton again in all my born days. I hope not! I most certainly hope not!"

They walked down the Fitchburg Railroad to where it all but touched Walden Pond and there, before them, perhaps a hundred yards to the north, was Henry's small cabin.

"Now, children, children! Not so fast! Wait now and we will arrive together. Henry may not be in his cabin and I don't want you all to go blustering in, turning things topsy-turvy." But the children could not wait and Melody and Patience set out running after them.

But Henry Thoreau, himself, they found, had turned things

topsy-turvy before their arrival. In the yard stood a bedstead, a table, a desk and three chairs. Also sundry cooking equipment such as skillets, dipper and frying pan. A japanned lamp stood elegantly upon the table.

"Oh — he's moving!" Sylvester cried. But no, Thoreau stood in his doorway and explained. He had felt he should do a job of cleaning before his company came. But he had not been able to get at it any sooner. It seemed unexpected things had come up. Yesterday he had spent all the afternoon watching a bevy of big black ants at battle. That was the way time got away from a man, he declared. So of course he'd had to do the cleaning this morning.

"The furniture seems glad to get outdoors too, once in a while. Have you ever noticed, Melody, how much more interesting things look outdoors than in? Now life-everlasting grows under my table and blackberry vines run through its legs." He began moving things inside with the help of the bigger children and when everything was to his liking he invited them all in.

"Perhaps we should stay outside, Henry," Melody suggested, seeing the small space. But no, they must come in. There was plenty of room, their host assured them. "None is so poor that he need sit on a pumpkin." He laughed, and the children laughed too. Perhaps Concord did not understand this man, as it often complained, but Brier's Nesters understood him very well.

"Now I have not so much furniture, I grant you," Henry said, as he placed a chair for Melody where she could look out upon the Pond. "But what's furniture? Thank God I can sit and I can stand without the aid of a furniture warehouse!" And so could they all, everyone declared, small Sylvester, especially. He could sit or stand without the aid of anything, and he demonstrated.

Beside the japanned lamp upon the table, Melody now noticed a copy of Homer's *Iliad*.

"Are you reading it, Henry?" she asked.

"Not much. Not much time, with beans to plant and hoe and harvest. I want you to see them coming through before you go back. Yes, beans to grow and ant battles to watch and blackberry vines to hobnob with; it all takes time." He laughed. "But I sustain myself by looking forward to reading it. Some time, when I can read it right. Because I think that books should be read as deliberately as they are written, Melody."

"Henry, couldn't we bring over some curtains some day? Mother has some not in use," offered Patience, kindly.

But said Henry, "Curtains? Why, Patience, there is nobody to look in at my windows but the sun and the moon and they are always welcome. A lady once offered me a mat for the floor. Kind of her, too. But I had no time to shake it out. So I just declined and I use the sod before the door to wipe my feet on. You see, Patience, it is best to avoid the beginning of evil!"

"I hate to shake floor mats, too," declared Patience, beginning to feel, all at once, that she and Henry Thoreau had much in common.

The children wandered outside and into the surrounding wood and Henry, now having shown the proper amenities of a host, suggested that they all go outside and look about. He proudly showed the bean patch, some of the plants so small that the body of the original planted bean still clung to it. When he saw that Melody was worried lest her youngsters trample something he led them into the wood.

He knows all the scientific names of everything, Melody thought, as she watched him showing the children this plant and that. Sylvester Millspaugh, especially, was interested. "I

heard tell you have tame fish here in this pond; have you? Sarah said you just go out and pick them up in your two hands as they swim by; do you, Hen?"

"When I can catch them, sometimes." Henry laughed. "But so could you." And then they were startled at somebody's halloo down the railroad. Melody flushed as red as the little new berry briars at her feet. If she had not remembered that voice, there its owner was, that Phillip Walton!

"I stopped over at the schoolhouse and then I remembered that it was last day and you were all coming out here to Mr. Thoreau's," he shouted as he leaped down the railroad embankment. "So I came too. I hope it is all right," and he looked at Melody. Thoreau assured him that it was better than all right. It was fine.

"I hear that you, too, are a teacher," Henry said, as he and the newcomer and Melody and Patience seated themselves in the yard again, while the children sought their own amusement in the wood.

"Well, yes, of sorts," Phillip said.

And at this reminder of his teaching activities all of Melody's ire against him rose within her again, and she could not help casting a withering eye upon him. Of sorts, it was true. Of the sort that skipped here and there and the other place for three days or three weeks. A sort that ousted young women teachers from their jobs. A mighty poor sort, if you asked her, in spite of the dimple and the fine, blond hair that swept back from his fine, fair brow. But when she looked at her friend Patience, with all this unsaid, she had to look quickly away, because Patience seemed ready to laugh.

"Well," said Thoreau, "I taught school a couple of years in Concord. But I'm better known out here at Walden than there."

I like it. I'm free. And who knows? Maybe I'll prove something with my pioneering."

"Would you not like to be a farmer, Mr. Thoreau? Plant and harvest on a large scale?" asked Phillip, as he bit into some young berry leaves he had pulled. And though he talked to their host he kept his eyes on Melody, that young lady could not help observing with some satisfaction.

"Well — no — I can't say that I would. You see with a farm I would no longer be free. Now John Poyer, across the valley there, has mortgaged his life for a farm, and he must go pushing his house and barn and sixty acres of woodlot, down through the long years before him. No, the independent man is not always the keeper of herds; most cases the herds become the keeper of the man."

At this Thoreau rose and went over to a small fire that had been burning in the yard, though so low it had appeared to be only a pile of smoldering ashes. "I have some loaves in here baking," he said, and the girls rushed over to see. Fancy a young man baking bread, and in an outdoor oven of his own manufacture!

"Why, Henry Thoreau! Tell me, do you use yeast and set it to rise like —" Melody had been going to say "like a woman would" but her good taste saved her the error.

"No, Melody, I don't. I used to, but one time, carrying the yeast in my pocket, it got too warm. I was delayed in getting home but the yeast would not be delayed in its natural purpose. Well, I'll tell you my pocket was a mess when that yeast began rising right there in it. So these days I just make my bread without yeast. And it stays sweet longer; it really does. I used to bake several loaves in the ashes in cold weather. I'd wrap them well and they would sweeten like a nut."

Now, with Henry's warm and fragrant loaves coming out of the oven, Melody and Patience spread a big red-and-white table-cloth upon the young spring grass and called the children to come and open their baskets.

"My, we will have music for our party," declared Patience. "What kind of birds are they, Henry?"

"Several kinds," he told her. "I have made notes telling of the habits of the different ones. I enjoy studying them. But I guess they were surprised when they found they had a man in a cage among them. Most times it is man who has the bird in the cage."

How the children laughed at this and drew near to Thoreau! Even Sylvester crowded up against him — Yes, who was usually shy with strangers.

"My, those hot loaves do smell good!" Melody all but burned her fingers upon one of them. "But tell us, Henry — everybody says you tell them something different when they ask you — but why do you like to live out here by yourself, like this?"

"Well, Melody" — Henry Thoreau laid his loaf with almost a proudness upon the red-checked cloth — "I wonder if I can tell you. I think I came to the wood because I wished to live — I wanted to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could learn what they had to teach. When I come to die, Melody, I don't want to find that I have not even lived. If I find life mean I want to publish its meanness to the world. If I decide that life is sublime I want to give a true account of it. One thing, and important, that I have learned and am still learning, is this: it is better to let one's affairs be not a hundred or a thousand but as two or three. It is best to keep one's accounts upon one's thumbnail."

"Would you advise — everyone — to live like this, Henry?" Melody was buttering a slice of warm bread for Sylvester as she spoke, and when she had handed it to him, she found another

thick, well-buttered slice thrust into her own hand by that Phillip. Well, if he wasn't sitting right here, almost up against her! She hadn't noticed!

"Well, Melody, as far as everyone living like this — now that is hard to answer. It reminds me of a young man I know, Amos Shulkett is his name. He recently came into a few acres down around the bend in the railroad, there. I think his uncle left it to him.

"Amos was telling me the other day that he would like nothing better than to live as I live — if he had the means! No, I wouldn't advise anyone to adopt my mode, purely on my own recommendation, that is. Before he had fairly given it a trial I, myself, may have found another mode that seems more satisfactory.

"No, I would have everybody be careful to find out and pursue his own way, not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's way. A youth may build or plant or sail. Only let him not be hindered from doing that which he would like to do. But I should not talk so much about myself and what I think. I do that frequently! I guess, though, it is because I know myself better than I know anybody else!"

Henry laughed and everyone joined in. Though the children listened little and understood less, they never let an opportunity to laugh slip by. This gave Rufus Carter a chance to say over a mouthful of poundcake, admiringly and unbelievingly, "Henry, was you ever in jail? Tobe Moody told me you was in jail once."

"I most certainly was, Rufus. I spent part of one night there — but not a cent of tax money! But shall we talk of jails before the ladies, Rufus?"

"Tell me, Mr. Thoreau, what would be the approximate cost of building such a house as this? Not that I would be hardy enough to stand the rigors of winter as you do. But I like the out-

doors too," said Phillip, the while he cast round his beautiful eyes at Melody and grabbed up this dish or that and urged it upon her. He was always looking down sort of sidewise and, well, tender-like, when she had to look up at him. Now he buttered the end of Henry's last loaf and ate it.

Well, if he were hooking up the idea of her, in any way, shape or form, with houses built or unbuilt, he could just — But the idea sent chills of delight all over her and at Patience's grin she pushed another thick slice of cold meat into the hands of Sylvester, who was already surfeited with food, as if his being filled completely to the top were all in this world that mattered.

"The cost of such a house?" asked Thoreau, meditatively. He took a small notebook from his pocket. "Well, now, here I have it. It cost me, boards, lathes, bricks, nails — let's see, twenty — and five is twenty-five — They cost me exactly twenty-eight dollars and twelve and a half cents. Of course those boards, now, I bought in a shanty that John Collins and his wife had built. John worked on the railroad there. I did make a little on the boards."

Now Melody began to look at the sky and wonder if she should not start home with the children. Then Henry Thoreau said that his neighbor around the pond, there, had planned to go in to Concord on his haycart that evening, and that took him right past Brier's Nest. There was Tom, now. Why didn't they all climb aboard and ride?

And they did. All, that is, except Melody and Phillip. And that happened by accident. Because the two of them had helped the little ones into the cart and she would have stepped upon the axle and in, herself, but just as she mounted, hoping that no ruffles or such showed — somebody quietly and quickly lifted her off again! The haycart started off at a brisk canter of the farm

horses; Henry had disappeared into his hut; and there she stood — she and Phillip Walton.

“Will you walk back to Concord with me, Melody? I have something to tell you,” he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SO?

NOW THE sun was setting and, as Melody and Phillip walked past Jenny Dugan's woods, its shadow laciness was the quietest thing Melody had ever seen or heard, she thought, and the most beautiful thing, too. At a wall of white stones that flanked a culvert over a little, murmuring stream, Phillip stopped. He sat down and drew Melody down beside him. Her wide and rosily flowered skirts all but covered the stone upon which she sat, and her great leghorn hat with the thick wreath of purple-velvet pansies hung from its black-velvet riband upon her shoulders. Of course Phillip had to sit very closely to her, the stones not being too wide. His wave of fair hair was not far from her eyes, in fact, the dimple in his cheek was not so terribly far from her lips, when it came to measuring distances. The sleepy birds in Jenny Dugan's woods roused themselves and took new interest. Seldom did the white-stoned culvert offer them such a picture.

"Melody, I have wanted to tell you about myself ever since I first met you — and carried you from a leaky boat onto shore." He looked at her keenly, in such a way that she could scarcely take her eyes from his own. "I am not, Melody, a wanderer roundabout, doing a great deal of nothing, as I may seem to be."

Now he was serious, all the laughter gone.

So that was it! The misunderstood male! As if she cared what or who he was, or whether in all his life he ever did anything here or there or elsewhere. And why talk about him? Men were the most conceited things she had ever seen in all her born days! But he continued, "Melody, I think you ought to know something about me before you completely condemn me to your ill graces. I must tell you —"

"You want to tell me about yourself. I know about you. I know all about you! You come dashing into a body's life — I mean into the village, and you take one's school away. And you don't even want a school yourself. You just dabble around a week or two in this school, and a couple of days in that one, here and there and roundabout to never and gone. Education is important, whether you think so or not, you and your shilly-shally ways! Oh, Phillip Walton, I just hope you go so far that —"

"Listen to me, Melody. I couldn't tell you before; I couldn't tell anybody, but I can tell you now. I am just as interested in education, fine and worth-while education for everyone, every boy or girl in America, whether they are poor, or needed to work on a farm, or underprivileged in any way, or whatever their chances are, as I can be. I'm working for children's schools, working hard toward establishing them all over the country. I'm working just as hard for them, and I have been all the time, Miss Melody Merrill, as you, yourself, are."

"That was why I was sent to Brier's Nest and the other hamlets that you say I have skipped over during the past year. There is a revolution going on in the teaching world, as you know, just the last year or so. And part of that revolution, even though it is a small part, I admit, has been my job."

"I have been sent from Boston, Melody, to visit and work in

and study the little village schools. To see what I thought they lacked and report back to Boston headquarters on what might possibly be done in various ways and in various places toward public school improvement. Other young men have been sent out from Washington, and from Pennsylvania and many other states, for the purpose of inspection and a report on conditions throughout the country."

"Well, why — why didn't you say so?" asked Melody inelegantly, and she dabbed her little lace handkerchief to her hot cheeks.

Phillip took the lacy bit from her fingers and assisted her tenderly.

"Could I, darling, when I came into a community, could I say to Millspaugh, for example, 'I'm here from Boston. Sent down from state headquarters to see what didoes you and your select board are cutting?' Could I say, 'I'm here to look you over and see how a finer and better school can be promoted' — when the school boarders are perfectly satisfied with the schools — and with their own positions on them as boardsmen? Could I say to such as Millspaugh, 'I'm here to recommend that you be thrown out on your ear if you need throwing out?' Mel, dear, I wanted to tell you my purpose from the first. I could see that you misunderstood my actions. But you do understand now, don't you, darling?"

Melody braided grass blades and said nothing.

"When I saw you standing up there in front of the children, your heart in your eyes for them all, I said to myself, that's just the sort of teacher all children need. As for me taking the Brier's Nest school myself, only for a week or two, though — you were gone. You had been staying at Millspaugh's house, taking care of his children, and he led me to understand that you and he

considered — And it was only after I had taken charge that it occurred to me he might have tricked us both. But still I couldn't believe you had given up your beloved work for marriage with him, and I went ahead and wrote you the letter. After all, darling, you never said anything in explanation; you just went around looking rosy and indignant at me."

Phillip lifted the leghorn hat, heavy with pansies, and set it upon her head. He fumbled awkwardly with the velvet ties as he would have done with a child. Melody allowed him to, though it was a time when wide leghorn hats were better to the back of the head as any girl would have known, but his fingers felt sweet beneath her chin.

"Yes — I guess I understand how it was," Melody admitted, a little uncertainly. For though the explanation had been good, still she felt that what — well — needed saying — had not been said at all. Some way, fine schools in Boston and Philadelphia and even Brier's Nest were, right now, of just no importance at all compared to — well — compared to other things. Yes, she could have put her eyes down against the cool white stones and never have lifted them again. Or her heart, either. She wished that this Phillip Walton would just fade into thin air, or some place far away from there. After he got her ribands tied. Not until after that.

"Melody, I know where you can get another position, now that you've finished for the season at Brier's Nest. There would not be much money in it, and it might be harder than your last job. But somebody is needed there, badly. It will be available any time from now on — that is, till the last of Junc. I don't think it will wait any longer."

"Why, where is it, Phil — Phillip? How many scholars?" asked Melody.

"Well, only one right now. One big fellow. Maybe three or four later. Three or four small ones. I saw how you looked after Sylvester, and I know you could do it. You might even keep Sylvester, in the deal."

"Why, my good lands of living, that would be an awfully little school. Do you mean a private tutor, or governess? And why isn't the big boy needed on the farm? Besides, no schools start in June—"

"But marriages do, darling. That's the month for weddings. And I didn't say it was a school—I said it was a position. The work is to take me for better or for worse and see if you can do as much with me as you did with Brier's Nesters. I'll promise to love you as much as they ever did, and I know that was a great deal."

Now Melody did not want to put her eyes against the cool white stones for comfort, but against that fine, striped stock. And she did. And when Phillip lifted up her face and kissed it, she said nothing, feeling that she had, perhaps, said too much already. Even the birds in the boughs of Jenny Dugan's woods, just back of them, were not having so much to say. It seemed a time for silences. Mid-May was a little late for love-making, by their calendar, but they knew it when they saw it.

Later, as Melody and Phil walked toward Concord and Heaven, Melody said, "But, Phil—darling—June, even the last, is so soon for the wedding. Maybe folks will say we're gay. Aunt Gilsey Boone was engaged to Uncle Haddon six years, and June would not be even six weeks for us. Do you think we ought to be engaged longer—maybe?"

"Mel, I've been engaged to you, in my own heart, ever since I carried you from that old leaky boat to shore in my arms, and that must be a year ago. A year is a good, long engagement, no matter

how Aunt Gilsey Boone dragged it out. I thought then, that night in the twilight, that I could never stand you down on your feet and see you walk away from me."

Phillip was carrying the pansied bonnet, swinging it by the chin ribands. So now they did not have to bother with that.

And just before Phillip left her at her own gate, Melody said, "Phillip, I think it will be wonderful, not only to be your wife but to work with you. I want to go on teaching. You'll work, in a big way, for the betterment of education in general, and I'll go on, teaching little schools like Brier's Nest. Little children need women teachers, Phil. I've always felt it."

"And so have a great many wise-thinking people," said Phillip. "Women teachers will come into their own. They'll have their day, and a glad day it will be for the world."

It was a lush and splendid day toward the last of June that Melody married Phillip at Brier's Nest schoolhouse. Of course it was often used as a church house when some circuit rider happened into the neighborhood, and Melody wanted their wedding there, anyway. For Brier's Nesters could and would come when some could not have attended in Concord, because the jeans were too washed out or the wagon needed an axle. Brier's Nest schoolhouse was like home to them and to Melody, too.

Since the first break of day, Sarah and Truessy and Drusy and all of the bigger girls had been over the hills with baskets, gathering wild flowers. As soon as the baskets were brought in the Alcott girls and Patience Sheridan arranged them in the bowls and jars and vases they had brought from home. These covered the shabby little desk completely, making it look like an altar. There were late violets and bluebells and new green leaves. Bounding water lilies from Walden, and ferns from Jenny Dugan's

woods. And there were roses and peonies from Brier's Nest and Concord front yards till the little schoolhouse was a fragrant bower.

The spinet too, that Nathan had brought over and that had played so sweetly for him and Rosanna Holt, just a few years before, was almost hidden by flowers. And later, during the wedding itself, there would be more flowers, but this was a surprise. It was something very new in weddings. Mrs. Farragut, of course, had known about it from the city papers and had suggested it.

And now came Mrs. Farragut, herself, preening importantly in and followed by her demure Charm School in a body. All Charm Schoolers' eyes were, of course, decorously cast down, but their hearts were cast up at the very thought of a wedding. Mrs. Farragut saw that they were seated, and then she rustled on down to the spinet and began to play sweetly.

At the sound of music those who had loitered in the schoolyard came in and found seats or stood along the wall in the back. The seats toward the front were reserved. And here came the ones they were reserved for. In marched Melody's scholars, every one washed and starched and ironed and combed within an inch of his life. They were all there but Sarah Millspaugh and her two older brothers and Jody Mullins.

But the Millspaugh boys were there at the door in brand-new suits that they had bought with their own earnings on the Merrill Farm, and they had lost that hangdog look that had hurt Melody so to see. One on each aisle led people down to their seats, just as Rosanna and Nathan had coached them to last night. They even smiled, and did it "with such a nice grace as if they had been born gentlemen," Mrs. Schoolmaster Snodgrass whispered to Mrs. David Sheridan. "Every bit as nice!" Mrs. Sheridan whispered back.

Young Sylvester sat down near the front with Mr. and Mrs. Merrill and his father, for old Millspaugh's part seemed an ignoble one, considering everything, and the Merrills did what they could about it. Young Ves would have stood up on the seat in his new suit and shoes and proclaimed to all that he was going to live with Miss Melody and Mr. Phillip and go to Boston with them, sometime, had he not been restrained.

All of the fathers and mothers with babies and past school-age children were there from Brier's Nest. From Concord came Henry Thoreau and his mother and the families of the Charm Schoolers, and so many that some must stand outside and hope to see the wedding through the windows and door. But anyway, all the good wishing and the kissing and the handshakings would go on out under the trees. Then would follow the big dinner, and singing and fun for the remainder of the wedding day. Phillip's own father and mother and his two young brothers were there from Boston, as well as a bevy of his young friends, both boys and girls.

At a nod from Nathan, Mrs. Farragut drifted into her own maze of melody and softly stepping, rather swaying, came the leader of the six maids. Her little head was high. She smiled at them as if it were a glad day for her that her beloved Miss Melody became a bride. Her white net skirts were such skirts as she had never before worn. They came to the floor and they were bouffant, and they had little pink and blue silken butterflies fluttering upon them, here and there. In her soft dark hair, that had been brushed to a sheen, were rosebuds.

Everyone gave a gasp of astonishment! It was none other than Sarah Millspaugh! Of course nobody had had such a young girl in a wedding procession before but Melody had not cared. She was determined that Sarah should have a part. She was deter-

mined that everyone should see for themselves, what fine and beautiful children the Millspaughs were. And Milly should have her part too. She was to come in, later, with the bridesmaids. She was tall and sweet and dignified, even if she was young. Yes, Melody was determined that everyone should admire the Millspaugh children, should see them and love them as she did, and as all of her family had learned to. They should have their chance. Just because their father was no-count and neglectful should not stand in their way. And everybody whispered that the little girl looked so sweet! Weddings ought to have little girls in them regularly.

After Sarah came Patience and Louisa Alcott, Milly Millspaugh and Ann Pruitt. Since all of Melody's own sisters were married they could not be bridesmaids; no married women for that, of course. And they all wore white; a colored frock for a bridesmaid would be as unheard-of as a married bridesmaid.

Mrs. Farragut toned her music down even more and it poured as softly from her finger tips as to seem only the fragrance of the flowers. Now all necks were frankly craned toward the door.

There they came — well, who was that? That little redhead girl in front? Jody Mullins was not a bit scared. She was all but laughing as she dipped her small hands into a basket of rosebuds and let them drip from her fingers, just before the feet of Melody and Phillip. Yes, Jody with her shining face, her hair pinned up into real cluster-curls of her own, atop her head, a blue riband about it, white ruffled frock to her small, slippered feet, all of which she could keep, frock, riband and slippers, looked to be a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

"Mrs. Farragut's idea." "They say it's stylish." "Flower girls, they call them"; these were some of the comments whispered. But what small Jody heard and would never forget was: "I de-

clare, seems like red hair is right pretty, if it's done up right, like them cluster-curls."

Now, at last, Melody and her Phillip. She could well have laid her dark little head upon his shoulder, she was that small, and he bowed his own golden one above her just a trifle as if he wished she would. Her hand was through his arm and he clasped it with one of his hands. She carried the bouquet of bride's roses that had come special from Boston.

Wings of fine, stiff lace swept up from her shoulders and the white satin basque was buttoned all the way down the front. One could have spanned her little waist with his two hands. Her hair was as high as Mrs. Farragut had been able to pile it, and the soft, glossy cluster-curls were her own. And now they bobbed and shone and glistened and curled under the lace veil. And the veil fell entirely to the floor and trailed a good two yards.

The pleasant-faced Millspaugh boys were looking as if they were glad they did not have to usher anyone in after the bride, one had better believe. A wedding veil would be a fine thing to tangle one's feet in!

Melody looked at them all and at the flower-decked altar, the scarred underneath desk-altar whereon she had laid all of her love for Brie's Nest with the old Blue-Backed Speller and Mc-Guffey's Reader. She looked down at Jody Mullins, before her. Rosebuds from Jody. She looked over at small and eager Sylvester, who was now allowed to stand up and wave his very clean hand at her ever so slightly. She looked at her brother Nathan, who was happy to be performing this marriage service for his sister. And then she looked up at her handsome Phillip.

Softer the music and headier the flower fragrance.

"From this day forward? For richer? For poorer? For better?
For worse? To have and to hold?"

"Till death do us part!"

Now the swift swelling of the music, and Melody and Phillip turned to go back up the aisle and out into the softer music of the birds, the sighing of the schoolyard trees, the glory of mid-morning.

"Darling! Darling!" Phillip murmured as they stepped over the threshold into the sweet June day.

And "Darling!" Melody whispered back.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is indebted to the following sources for dates, customs, styles and much factual matter that makes the story of Gay Melody possible:

- History of American Life* A. W. Schlesinger
Wagons West Elizabeth Page
Wedding Customs Then and Now Carl Halliday
Photography of the American Scene Robert Taft
Our Times Mark Sullivan
Ladies Book of Etiquette Hartley
Invincible Louisa Cornelia Meigs
Louisa May Alcott, dreamer and worker Belle Moses
Louisa May Alcott Katherine Anthony
1001 Christmas Fads & Fancies Alfred Carl Hottes
Old Time Schools & School Books Clifton Johnson
McGuffey's Readers American Book Co., (Publ.)
Personal Letters of Maryann Wood Loaned by Marjorie Hoinka
Mad Forties Grace Adams & Adam Hutter

GAY MELODY

<i>Walden</i>	Henry David Thoreau
<i>Christmas & Christmas Lore</i> ..	T. G. Crippen
<i>Thoreau</i>	Henry Seidel Canby
<i>Barnum</i>	M. R. Werner

Although not actual quotations, the views expressed by Alcott and Thoreau in conversations with other characters are authentic and voice their views as the afore-mentioned historians give them.

